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STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES

Volume 3

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, Editor

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the editor's page

NOT LONG AFTER WRITING the first part of this essay, but too late to be influenced by any further source material, I received a copy of a very fine publication called *The Armchair Detective* (see the review department for further data), which contained an article by J. R. Christopher, "Poe and the Detective Story". Mr. Christopher considers the notion that Edgar Allan Poe invented the detective story to be a half-truth, although he allows Poe so much credit later on in the article that the fraction really ought to be changed to two-thirds. However, I will cheerfully concede his main point: It is more nearly correct to say that Mr. Poe is the true father of a certain type of detective story.

There were indeed mysteries in fiction, solved in the course of the story before Poe; there may have been tales very nearly, if not entirely, centered around crime and the bringing of criminals to justice; and I assume there were stories involving the police or what we would call a police detective, who solves a crime-centered puzzle. And surely there both "true crime" stories and fiction based upon actual records.

What was unique about *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*? Let us recapitulate some of the many elements in it, which would be carried forward, or at least onward, by Poe's successors. Some of these are actual

"firsts" in fiction; I am diffident about saying that all are firsts.

1. C. Auguste Dupin is a private citizen, neither presently nor formerly a policeman, or associated with the police in their work.

2. Dupin is an eccentric individual, with a genius for induction and deduction, as applied to human behavior.

3. Dupin has not made a special study of crime and criminal methods beyond the extent to which an ordinary, well-read person of his time would have done.

4. We see Dupin through the eyes of a close friend and associate, whose capabilities are above average, but lesser than Dupin's.

5. Dupin is attracted by the extraordinary features of the crime in the Rue Morgue; ordinary crimes do not interest him.

6. The case is a locked room mystery. (My thanks to Mr. Christopher, for reminding me of this.)

7. Several important clues are presented squarely to the reader in the initial accounts of the crime that Dupin and the narrator read in the papers. The number of clues is not important; what is important is that the reader is given a fair chance to see an essential part of the truth before the detective reveals it.

8. But even if the reader does follow these clues to a logical con-

clusion, the crime still appears to be impossible.

9. Dupin has apparently reached a tentative conclusion from reading the newspaper accounts. However, if this conclusion is correct, the police have overlooked something which is there to be seen.

10. Dupin arranges to examine the scene of the crime with the consent of the police. Relations between him and the Perfect show mutual respect and reasonable amity.

11. Dupin considers police methods adequate for most crimes, which are committed by people with very little imagination. He is interested only in the unusual cases, for which routine methods are inadequate. He acknowledges that, in the routine cases, the police can do better than he can.

12. Dupin is spurred to solve the riddle of Rue Morgue by the fact that a person whom he is certain is innocent has been arrested and charged with the murders.

13. Dupin satisfies himself by an examination of the scene of the crime that his hypothesis is correct. The reader is shown exactly what this evidence is, and, if astute now knows essentially as much as Dupin does.

14. Dupin does not at once present his findings to the police, but sets a trap for the person he seeks.

15. Dupin does not turn this party over to the police, once he has heard the entire story—a good deal of which he has deduced.

16. Dupin presents the police with just enough data to insure the release of the wrongly-arrested gentleman. (Let us remember that some readers may not yet have read this story; that is why I tell no more here.)

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17. Even if the astute reader has solved the puzzle in essence before Dupin reveals the whole truth, there are aspects of the final summation which are likely to be a surprise, and this summing up is rewarding to read. (My opinion is that even the most alert and ingenious reader never figures out the whole truth as revealed at the end, in a well-done puzzle detective story.)

18. There are no sub-plots in the story.

19. Dupin and the narrator neither run into danger, nor are they threatened with violence.

20. *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* is a short story. (An earlier writer than Poe, using the same material, very probably would have made it into a long novel, which would have had to have been filled out with extraneous material. Nothing inessential is in Poe's story except the introduction, which was necessary in this pioneering instance.)

Had Poe never written a second story dealing with Dupin, this single entry would still be a moment for everyone today who loves the puzzle type of mystery tale, wherein the puzzle is solved by reason, rather than physical violence, and the reader is given that basic minimum of correct clues he needs to solve the puzzle himself—if he's astute enough. This is the sort of fiction I refer to when I say I greatly enjoy detective or mystery stories; but it is not, of course, the only kind that exists, or again the only kind that might be worth your reading or mine: I do not wish to demean other kinds *ipse facto*, but merely to make it clear that, generally having little interest in

them, and generally having avoided them, I cannot speak about them either with fairness or authority.

As things stand, Poe did write more than one story about Dupin, so let's look at what he did in the second story, *The Mystery of Marie Roget*.

This, I am told, is the least popular of the three tales, although I should think that the person who enjoys true crime stories the same way I enjoy mystery-puzzle fiction would find it the best of the three.

A young girl, named Mary Cecilia Rogers, was murdered in the vicinity of New York; at the time that Poe wrote his second Dupin tale, the crime had not been solved. And so, fascinated by his theories of ratiocination, Mr. Poe set out again to do something which I have not heard had ever been done in fiction before. He essayed to solve not a crime that took place in the dim past, but a still-unsolved mystery of the present—one which theoretically might be solved between the time that his story was being printed and the time it came to the attention of the reader. He was, indeed, risking disaster for his theories.

For what Poe did was to take the Mary Rogers case and transpose each separate element of it—using nothing more than newspaper accounts. As the brief introduction to this tale (in the Walter J. Black one-volume edition of Poe's works—1927) states in part: "The 'Mystery of Marie Roget' was composed at a distance from the scene of the atrocity, and with no other means of investigation than the newspapers

(Turn to Page 120)

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The Gray Killer

by Everil Worrell

*Narrative and Diary of Marion Wheaton, Patient in R — — Hospital
from November 15 to November 28, 1928.*

SUCH TERRIBLE THINGS are happening here that I feel the need to set them down, as I dare not speak to anyone of my thoughts and of my fears. I will go back and begin at the beginning, a few nights ago. Later, if there is more to be written — God grant there may not be! — I will continue this narrative as a diary.

It began three nights ago — and this is the twenty-sixth of November. The red light in the corridor outside my door burned like an eye lit with an ugly menace. In the dead of night, bells sounded intermittently — the shrill ringing of the telephone, or the rasping buzzer that could mean so

Who was this new doctor who performed injections himself, and whose patients suddenly showed miraculous recoveries?

The issue of *WEIRD TALES* which ran *Ancient Fires* bore a cover illustrating a story called *The Bird of Space*, by a new author, EVERIL WORRELL. The "bird" was a creature capable of living between planets, used as tame transport by a weird humanoid who came here to capture human beings for purposes generally considered objectionable. The following issue ran a sequel, *Cattle of Furoa*, wherein all is straightened out, as the ending of the first story left many readers dismayed. (In those days, there was considerable protest if evil triumphed, or seemed to, at the end of a story.) Miss Worrell had a total of 18 stories in WT, the last one, *I Loved Her with my Soul*, appearing in the September 1953 issue—which was also the first issue on pocket-size format. Most popular of her tales was *The Canal* (December 1927; reprinted April 1935), which has seen anthologization.

many things. Cold, and the need to borrow strength to spread a blanket within fingertip reach. Night loneliness and night terrors; fear of the known and of the unknown; fear of a stabbing agony called life and of a veiled release called death. Terror of pain. And in the shut-in private rooms and in the bare, orderly wards, that hydra-headed horror of a hospital — pain itself.

I, too, was in pain. A rusty nail had gone through the thin sole of my slipper and torn a gash in my foot which nearly ended in blood poisoning. And on the night of November twenty-third I lay tossing in my hot bed, feeling the burning lances of flame shoot upward from the horribly swollen foot.

Lying so, I had the horrors, rather. I was not out of the woods, not by a long shot. My foot might mend rapidly, or it might yet take a sudden turn for the worse, in which case I should leave this narrow room only for a narrower one. The woman across the hall, who had had her fourth operation for cancer, would be leaving so, perhaps, and would, I believed, be glad to go. Her broken moans had seemed to tell me that. And there was a man down the corridor who groaned . . .

Well, I wished it were over and I were well, and safely out of the place. And in the meantime the bed-covers were too heavy and were burning me up, adding needlessly to my tortures.

I rang my bell, and listened to its dull, rasping sound in the distance. In some hospitals only a light flashed on a signal board and over your door — better arrangement, I'd say.

I waited for Miss Larcom or Miss Wurt. Miss Larcom would seem glad to see me—she would make me feel better and think of little extra things to do for me. Miss Wurt would snap at me, cross at having had to put down her novel. And she would do as little as she could, and very likely drag the covers roughly over that fiendish foot of mine. But if Miss Wurt were on the floor tonight, I should likely have to ring again.

I waited. It didn't do to ring again too soon. Then Miss Wurt would be certain to let those covers saw across my foot—or was that one of those sick, invalid fancies of which one hears? Still, all nurses aren't alike, and they aren't all angels.

I waited, and heard an unfamiliar footstep, that seemed to slide a little—not to shuffle but to slide, as a serpent would slide on hard ground or on a hard floor. Why did a coldness strike me then, that made me draw closer the covers that had irked me?

Sick terrors of a hospital night! I fixed my gaze unwaveringly on the doorway. Mustn't let Miss Wurt catch me looking or acting goofy. It would be fun for her to recommend me to the psychopathic ward. (No, of course I didn't think that seriously; of course I was just being an imaginative sick person.)

At any rate, my whole attention was on the dim-lit oblong of my door. The footsteps that sounded, somehow, so unusual, paused before a figure was framed there; not, however, before one of the feet that made the sliding sound was visible. There it was, for a few moments, alone: the end of a shoe that seemed enormously long. Then the figure caught up with the foot—not Miss Wurt or Miss Larcom, but a man.

A man dressed in gray. A man whose *face* (in the half-light, at least) was gray. Whose face, whose form, whose way of walking, I—didn't like. My fingers sought the bell cord.

Before they found it, however, the room was flooded with light. That seemed reassuring, somehow, and I was ashamed of my panic—my flightiness I ought perhaps to call it.

In a hospital you get used to people going and coming, surprising you when you're awake, surprising you when you're asleep. Strange nurses with thermometers happen in every day; strange house doctors now and then. I didn't need his statement now to fit him in.

"I'm Dr. Zingler, the new house doctor. Haven't seen you before. I have heard you had a hard time with your foot. I came because I heard your bell, and the nurse did not answer. Miss Wurt—I will

send her, though I am afraid she moves slowly. In the meantime, if it is pain, I can help you."

In a reaction from the fantastic fear that had laid hold on me, I smiled warmly up at the strangely pallid face. Grayish skin, sunken cheeks, hollow, hungry eyes, and a strange, deathly immobility of feature — if an attractive personality was necessary to success the new house doctor was foredoomed to failure. Yet his professional manner was good enough, though somehow rather strange, too. Suave and smooth, but — indescribably queer.

I smiled, with an effort. "Pain — yes, my foot hurts." I answered him, trying to make light of it. "But I rang for Miss Wurt merely to have her turn back the top coverings, to cool my foot, especially. I feel as though it were roasting over red-hot coals."

The ill-favored face looking down on me seemed to attempt a smile of sympathy.

"Miss Wurt will be able to make you more comfortable, no doubt," he promised. "But I think I can do more — I think I can insure you sleep for the remainder of the night. I'll just give you a hypodermic."

A wave of gratitude swept over me. I'd had a few brief intervals of forgetfulness when the pain was greatest, by the administration of a hypo; lately these had been discontinued. Complete oblivion for a few hours would be welcome now.

I watched Dr. Zingler as he busted himself with a small box and its contents, which he took from a pocket; did the man carry hypodermics and opiates always like this, ready for instant use? Generally the doctors rang for a nurse . . .

The hypodermic, held in a bony long-fingered hand of the same unholy color as Dr. Zingler's face, moved toward me. I glanced at it, idly, baring my arm for the merciful prick. It was near my face as I looked at it. Heavens, how strange! Or was it due to fever that every little happening of this night took on a grotesque significance? Be that as it may, the appearance of the liquid in the hollow glass tube was violently repulsive to me: a viscid, slimy-looking, yellowish white, with an overtone of that same gray color that made the hand holding it look like the hand of a corpse. At the same moment an odor assailed my nostrils: a putrescent aroma of decay; the very essence of death embodied in a smell.

The needle was approaching my arm when I drew away from it — hurled myself from it, rather, forgetful of my foot, crouching in the far corner of my narrow hospital bed like a trapped animal at bay.

"No, no!" I cried, my voice rising queerly. "I won't take it, I'm not in pain, I need nothing! I'll ring, I'll scream! I'll arouse the whole floor!"

The gray doctor—so I thought of him and shall always think of him—withdraw his hand, an expression of extreme contempt stamping his immobile features.

"Of course, if you prefer to bear your pain!" he shrugged. "Though it hardly needed such vehemence. There's a ward for patients like you where the walls are thicker. As to arousing *this* floor, I think you've succeeded in your humane endeavor. Listen!"

I listened. God forgive me, I had succeeded. The woman with the cancer was moaning pitifully—but for the opiates given her so heavily she would doubtless be shrieking. Down the hall the man with the grievous hurt was groaning, delirious too:

"Mary, you've come at last! Oh, no, nurse, it's only you! She died in the accident—I remember," he wailed. And then, again: "Oh, Mary, at last!"

Also the little boy who had had a tonsillectomy done yesterday was screaming down the hall, hoarse, half-intelligible words.

I buried my head beneath the covers in an agony of shame as I heard the sliding step of the doctor withdrawing. Through my door it passed and across the hall, and I heard the familiar hinge of the cancer patient's door creak. Well, perhaps he could quiet her, the new doctor. What had been the matter with me, anyway? Had I been mad?

Another footstep approached my door, a well-known footstep. Miss Wurt's healthy, round, red face appeared like an unamiable harvest moon. She fixed my covers, not so roughly as I had feared, and stood ready to depart. "That all?" she suggested hopefully.

"Almost." I said, detaining her with an urgent gesture. "But tell me—is Dr. Zingler often on the floor at night? He's—a queer-looking man, is he not?"

The red of Miss Wurt's face deepened to a mild purple. Some attraction between her and the new doctor, on her side at least, that was certain. Then my remark had been undiplomatic.

It had.

"I've never heard any of the patients comment on Dr. Zingler's personal appearance," she said in icy reproof.

I was glad to drop the subject. Next morning, however, I had a real surprise.

Miss Edgeworth, my day nurse, was a friendly girl, who had fallen

into a habit of gossiping with me about the people and happenings around the hospital. After the night I hailed her coming with relief. I'd even dare tell her if I chose, I thought, that the new house doctor gave me the horrors.

"Have you seen Dr. Zingler?" I began tentatively as she wet my wash cloth, preparatory to washing my face.

"Dr. Zingler?" she answered with a quick look of pleasure and what appeared to be a blush. "He's the kind that makes the grind go easier. Handsome, too, isn't he? Or have you seen him?"

"Yes — " I hesitated. "I've seen him."

I said no more. Surly, gray pallor, those mask-like features — handsome! I turned my face to the wall and lay brooding. My foot was better today. I had leisure to wonder if I need feel graver concern for my mind. Last night was a nightmare, and the new "handsome" doctor a hideous ghoul! No, no — what was I thinking? Things that weren't possible! Had I fallen victim to an obsession, a hallucination?

The greater part of the morning I brooded. And then I heard something that made me forget myself.

The house doctor whom I was accustomed to see on his daily rounds, Dr. Rountree, called a little after 3. Like Nurse Edgeworth, he occasionally stayed for a short chat. Today, however, I knew at once that he had something important on his mind — something, perhaps, which he hesitated to speak of.

"Have you heard the news about that cancer patient you've been grieving so over?" he began.

"The cancer case?"

I think there was horror in my voice. In my mind was a picture of a gray figure stalking, *sliding* in at the door behind which those hopeless moans were uttered. I think I was prepared for something gruesome, something incredibly awful, certainly not for Dr. Rountree's next words.

"It's something like a miracle, it seems," he said. "You know, we don't talk about these things, but this case was really hopeless. There couldn't have been another operation: and the thing still was gnawing at her vitals. Well! It was a case for increasing opiates until the end, with the opiates losing their power to alleviate. You've heard her moaning in spite of them. But today! Have you heard her? Listen!"

I listened. No, it was true, I had not heard her. The man down the corridor still groaned. The little boy who had lost his tonsils did not cry so much. The cancer patient had been silent all the morning, as she was now.

Again I felt a recurrence of my first horror. "Not—dead!" The word one hates even to think in a hospital.

But Dr. Rountree shook his head and made a quick gesture with his hand that he used in moments of great enthusiasm.

"Oh, no, no!" he said quickly. "So much better that we've discontinued all opiates. Fully conscious and out of pain. A miracle, positively. She had an opiate last night, she says, though it isn't down on her chart. She was semi-conscious and didn't know who gave it to her, but she had that one—and hasn't needed one since. And she's stronger, too; the mere cessation of pain, I suppose, has given her the will to live. If it goes on this way her wound will heal and she'll go out in two weeks time, a well woman. I've never heard of such a thing!"

"Dr. Zingler went into her room. He had wanted to give me an opiate and must have given her hers," I said. "He's—rather hard to look at, isn't he?"

Dr. Rountree's face showed puzzlement. "Didn't know Zingler was on last night, but he'd leave the opiates to the nurses, I should think," he said shortly. "He'll have the patients expecting the doctors to wash their faces for them next. As to looks, you're the first girl I've heard express a contrary opinion. Most of the nurses seem to think he's an Atlantic City beauty."

I tried during the rest of the long day to be glad of my neighbor's good fortune. I could not. I could only think with a kind of shrinking dread of the "handsome" Dr. Zingler slipping in at her door in the dead of night.

Of course it was only coincidence that the gray doctor had administered the woman's last opiate, and that the next day she had been so miraculously better. Only coincidence. Nevertheless, I inconsistently told myself that I would rather die than be miraculously cured by Dr. Zingler.

Night came. Again the red light in the darkened hall loomed sinister, ominous, and the shadows it gave were macabre. My foot was better tonight—still a tortured thing of fire and anguish, yet definitely better. If I had rung for a sedative which I had had upon request several times, I might have slept. But I didn't want to sleep, though I knew that sleep was necessary to my recovery. I had a horror of sleeping and waking to see a long, narrow foot pressing the threshold of my door—to see a gray figure creeping in at that door.

I would have given worlds to be able to lock my door on the inside.

Since that was impossible I had it left open as usual, and kept my eye on the dull red oblong of light.

Hour after hour. The man down the hall was groaning, now—groaning in delirium, raving of the accident that brought him here. Not an auto smash, but a derailed train. I'd read of it. Only a few passengers hurt, but this man's wife, Mary, had been killed. He was crying her name out loud again, calling to her.

His groans—they hurt. Hospital nights! Awfulness of pain. Oh, why didn't someone hear and go to him? Miss Wurt on duty again, of course, and reading in whatever quiet corner she spent her nights. If she heard the groans, she didn't care. Oh, *why didn't someone go?*

And then I knew someone was going. For I heard footsteps, and they were the slow, sliding steps of Dr. Zingler. A door opened and shut. After a little, the groaning was cut off suddenly, as though a sound-proof wall had intervened.

Then I lay listening, till, after a long time, those sliding footsteps crept into the corridor. No sound, now, from the man who had groaned, as they retreated—going in the opposite direction from my door, thank God!

And still not another sound from the man who had groaned. The sufferer might have had his throat cut.

Next morning, however:

"You'd never imagine the things that are going on in this hospital!" Miss Edgeworth cried as she brought my morning thermometer. "Too bad you haven't come in for a miracle. You're mending, but slowly. Not like the case across the hall, I mean, or the railroad accident."

"The man from the railroad wreck—oh, what became of him!" My voice was sharp with anxiety, and Miss Edgeworth showed surprise and a little disapproval.

"You're guessing wrong, when you ask what's 'become of him' in *that* tone!" she said. "What's 'become of him' is that an almost hopeless spine condition is miraculously improved. He is out of pain. He can move his legs under the covers and we thought they'd always be like fallen logs. That's what's 'become of him'!"

I turned my face to the wall, because I couldn't smile, couldn't show the decent human emotion of pleasure at another merciful reprieve. Why couldn't I? Because my mind could image just one thing: the sound of those horrible, sliding footsteps last night, the picture I had visualized then of a lanky form and a gray death's-head creeping in at the delirious man's door—creeping out, leaving silence behind him.

What kind of opiate did the new doctor dispense, that not only alleviated pain, but cured everything from cancer to an injured back? Well, of course there was no connection; if there were, I should be honoring the gray doctor as a worker of miracles. But I didn't. I felt a greater horror of him than ever — and that horror extended itself now to the two who had so strangely recovered after his midnight visits.

Not for all the gold in the mint would I have entered the room of the cancer patient, or the room of the man who had been in the railroad wreck.

The next two nights I slept heavily. My foot was improving more rapidly, and I was worn out with pain and with night vigils. True, I closed my eyes with a sense of surrounding peril of some queer, undreamable kind, but I closed them nevertheless, and opened them only as the winter dawn crept in at my windows. And on the second morning I think I must have given Miss Edgeworth a real shock.

She had merely mentioned the little boy who had had his tonsils out. "Rodney Penning — the little tonsillectomy case —" she began.

I caught her arm in a grip that must have hurt. "Has *he* had a sudden strange improvement?" I asked in a tone that rang unpleasantly in my own ears.

Miss Edgeworth drew her arm away from me and passed the fingers of her other hand speculatively over her sleeve.

"I think you've bruised me, Miss Whetson," she said reprovingly; "I must speak to the head nurse about a sedative for you. I don't know why you should be so dreadfully nervous, now your foot's doing so well. As for little Rodney Penning — I don't understand your question. Of course he's improved. Many children leave the hospital on the day of a tonsillectomy. Little Rodney is going home tomorrow."

I can hardly write of the horror of that tomorrow. I can hear yet the screams of little Rodney's mother — when little Rodney went home.

The little lad had cried pitifully after the operation on his throat. That wound had been agony for a child to bear. But the making of it was merciful: *that* cutting had been done under anesthesia. There was no anesthetic when the little boy's newly healed throat was neatly cut from the outside, so that his head was nearly severed from the trunk, and a great pool of blood had washed with red, as though a careless painter had smeared his paints, the skylight over the operating-room. The skylight? Yes, that was where the body was found, a shapeless black blob against the wan-starred sky of early dawn.

But the worst thing of all I have not yet written down. The worst thing of all was also the thing in which lay the greatest mystery.

Surely little Rodney Penning had been done to death by a mad fiend, for his body was transfixed with a needle-shaped bar of iron, bearing on the pointed end a barb suggestive of the barb of a fish-hook. And to the blunter end of the bar appended a fine but strong steel cord. It was as if some maniac obsessed with the harmless sport of fishing had played at using human bait. Only, if so, scarce half a mile from the hospital pounded the surf of the Atlantic. So why did he choose the hospital roof to carry out his grim travesty?

Writing this has turned me quite sick. If it had not been for this horror, I would soon be able to leave the hospital—and to tell the truth, I have conceived a horror of the whole place. The condition of my foot now permits me to get around on crutches. But they say, and my doctor says, that I am too nearly in a state of nervous collapse to permit of my discharge. And besides, an eruption has appeared on my body which has resulted from my near approach to blood poisoning, and which they say requires observation. I am on a special diet, and everyone is particularly thoughtful and considerate—even Miss Wurt. But I do not see how I can get better with this horror clutching at my heart.

They didn't mean to tell me, of course. But I had heard the screams of little Rodney's mother, and wormed the truth out of black Hanoah, who brings the patients' trays. I was hysterical then, and from something the house doctor who is my friend, Dr. Rountree, said to me, I must have said some terrible things about Dr. Zingler. Dr. Rountree's eyes are dark and very deep, and can be very kindly and pitiful, and I know that he meant me to take what he said very seriously.

"Don't speak of your feeling about Dr. Zingler, Miss Wheaton, to anyone. Much better yet, never speak of Dr. Zingler at all."

I wish I had friends in this city. I wish I could be moved at once to another hospital. I don't seem quite able to arrange such a thing from inside. I spoke of it to my doctor, who is a great specialist, and so of course very impersonal. His eyes narrowed as he answered me, and I knew that he was studying me—regarding me as a case, and not as a human being.

"I can't order all my patients out of the hospital because of the most awful occurrence that has given you the horrors, Miss Wheaton, for I don't attribute it to any negligence on the part of the hospital officials. None of the other patients know of this thing. You gossip too much, ask too many questions for your own good, inquire too much into the goings

on around the hospital. Then I must add to that an unfortunate tendency on your part to take personal dislikes, and most unreasonable ones. Not, for instance, that it injures Dr. Zingler to have you conceive an abhorrence for him—not, even, that it discredits him that you should accuse him in a hysterical fit and utterly without reason, of being the fiend killer. No, it only does *you* harm."

The lecture went on. I turned my face to the wall. When the head nurse came in, a person who seems to have considerable authority, I said meekly that I would like to be moved to another hospital. She said only:

"There, there! Dr. Smythe-Burns wants you to stay here. We'll have you feeling more like yourself before long. And Dr. Smythe-Burns orders your nightly sedative continued. We'll have no more midnight blues."

Tuesday, November 26. For all that, I had a nightmare last night.

I dreamed, most realistically, that I lay in the half stupor which bridges, under a heavy sedative, the awful chasm between "Visitors out" and the dawn light. And as I lay so, a figure came creeping in at my door—creeping on long, strangely sliding feet, and carrying in a gray, bony hand a hypodermic. The figure came close to my bed, and by a supreme miracle of will I opened my mouth and gasped my lungs full of air for a scream that would have roused the floor, if not the whole hospital—while my heavy hand moved spasmodically to grasp the bell-cord. For a while my eyes locked with the deep-set eyes in the gray face bent above me. Those eyes into which I looked were cold as the eyes of a serpent—utterly inhuman, I thought.

After a while the eyes changed in expression. The lean, gray figure shrugged its shoulders and drew away. Then—thank God!—it left me. But I had a sort of knowledge that it meant to wait until a time when I would fail to wake.

I sounded out Miss Edgeworth about the strength of the sedative I am getting. She says it is enough to hold me, most likely, in a deep sleep all night. If I dared tell her about *last* night—but somehow I don't, after Dr. Rountree's warning. I asked my doctor, when he came, to reduce the strength of the sedative, saying I did not like to sleep so heavily it would take a great deal to waken me. He shook his head, and said I'd get over my nervous fancies, and assured me that all entrances and exits and fire escapes are being patrolled. I doubt that. It costs money to set a patrol, and I don't think it's done in a place where a single crime has occurred. In cases of *repeated* horrors—

I mustn't let myself think of the things that may be *going to happen*. But—I doubt, anyway, if any ordinary patrol could catch the gray doctor.

Wednesday, November 27. I made a last attempt today, and failed.

I don't know why I had hesitated to ask Dr. Rountree's intervention. Perhaps because I like him so much. When you feel yourself staking in a horrible morass of dread and terror, there isn't much time or energy to spare for ignoring real things. Vincent Rountree has come to be a sort of symbol to me—a symbol of all that is sound and normal, humanly healthy, pityingly tender and strong. I think he likes me too; I have been studying myself in a hand mirror at times, wondering why he should—for the dark blue of my eyes looks too sad with the dark blue circles worry has set beneath them. My hair is silky still and softly brown, but the natural curl has been all dragged out of it by fever and tossing, and although the eruption is not on my face, my face is white and drawn-looking.

It was late this afternoon when he stopped in for the two minutes' chat I look forward to, and the sunlight slanting in at my window had already the hazy tinge of an early winter sunset.

"Could you do anything, Dr. Rountree—in your capacity of house doctor—" I began.

His answer put an end to my last hope. "Miss Wheatoo, I've already tried. I suggested to your doctor—much more strongly than etiquette permits—well, the situation is delicate. He is afraid of offending the hospital authorities with no reason. If you discharged him and called another doctor, the situation would be much the same. I hope you'll try to take it as calmly as you can, for really all the patients in this hospital should be very safe now. It is true that special precautions are being taken with regard to seeing visitors out, and the like."

I did not answer. The hazy yellow sunlight was fading fast—and with it my hopes. All at once a thought had definitely formed itself in my mind: that I should not leave the hospital at all—not living. I wished that I had died of blood poisoning. That is not so dreadful—not nearly so dreadful as some other things.

Vincent Rountree bridged the dark chasm of my thoughts, speaking almost shyly.

"I gained just one point—permission to take you out some evening soon in my car, in case you should consent to go. It would rest and refresh you—"

Thursday, November 28. Another weary night has passed and morning come—a morning of driving rain and wind that howled around the hospital's corners like a banshee. It was a fit day for a culmination of horrors—though no day could be evil enough for the gruesome discoveries this day has brought forth.

At 7 in the morning, the hour when the day nurses relieve the night shift, I heard one of the girls crying bitterly. There was a good deal of running around, then voices raised and lowered quickly.

After half an hour or so of this, there was a silence. Such a silence as I hope never again to hear. It was like the sudden stalking of death itself into the midst of a group of agitated, sentient beings.

My heart was beating heavily as I listened alone in my room. And then I heard sounds of sobbing—of more than one person sobbing.

But a little later, I beheld an agony of grief that called to mind Gethsemane.

One of the night nurses had come to the end of the corridor where my room was—to get away from the others, I suppose. She did not see that my door was open—did not even look at it. She leaned against the wall, shaking from head to foot, making no attempt to cover her face. Her arms hung down limply, as though there was no life in them. From one hand dangled her nurse's cap. Her face was so drawn and contorted with anguish that her own mother would not have known her, and her wide eyes seemed to stare as at a specter. No tears came to ease her soundless, shattering sobbing.

When I could not stand it any longer, I called to the girl, and she came as though she were walking in her sleep, and stood in my door.

"Won't you please—please tell me what has happened?" I begged.

Still in that sleep-walking manner, she answered me, her words sounding like the words of a thing that has been learned by heart:

"I am—I *was* in charge of the night nursery—the little, new babies you know. Last night after the last feeding I fell asleep. Somehow I overslept, and so no one knew what has happened until the day shift came on."

"And—what has happened?" I prompted her in spite of myself, my tongue sticking to the roof of my mouth.

"One of the babies—the youngest little baby—a little baby two days old—"

Suddenly a realization seemed to strike the girl. I was a patient. She was a nurse. She had said too much to stop now—but she mustn't tell me anything too dreadful.

"A baby was kidnapped last night," she ended lamely.

Kidnaped! It is a terrible, dreadful thing for a little baby to be kidnaped—to disappear. But I think I know—oh, yes, *I know* what blacker horror the word covered.

I have not forgotten little Rodney Penning.

Afternoon. One of the unfortunate nurse's friends came hunting for her and took her away. And all the weary, dreary day of driving rain, gloom was like an evil fog in the hospital. This time, no one can forget the tragedy for a moment. The nurses seldom talk together and if they do they seem half afraid of the sound of their own voices.

One selfish thought came to give me relief—that now, perhaps Dr. Smythe-Burns—and yet, perhaps not! The web of hospital and professional etiquette is too deep for me to fathom, as it has proved too strong for me to break. In any case, Dr. Smythe-Burns has not been in today, and I shall have to wait for his next visit. Another curious thing about hospital etiquette is that you can't telephone your doctor from the hospital. Anything he needs to know about you. Someone else will tell him—perhaps. At any rate, you can't.

As I write, there is a congregation of doctors and nurses outside the closed door of the cancer patient across the way. A while ago I heard them gathered outside another door down the corridor. I wonder what can have happened to excite them—for I am sure they seem excited. At least the woman who had cancer has not disappeared, nor has she had a recurrence of pain. I saw her through her half-opened door this morning, eating a hearty breakfast.

Those worried faces outside her door grow graver and graver. Surely this one day can bear no heavier burden of evil than it has already disclosed.

I can't hear the voices across the hall. I am glad. I don't want to hear them. Those faces are too much to have seen, in their worry and—yes, *horror and fear again*. If any more black mishaps are to be known, I want to be spared them. I have almost reached the point where I can endure no more.

Now they are talking louder. I am afraid I shall hear—*something I don't want to hear*.

"Dr. Fritz, we didn't dare pronounce in so grave a matter until we had *your* opinion—"

"And at the same time the patient in 26—the railroad accident case—"

"Both had made miraculous recoveries—pitiful, to end in this!"

"Her husband will be heartbroken. Hard to tell him—but there's no possible course but immediate isolation."

"I hardly think before tomorrow—"

"They can be sent away tomorrow. There's a small colony—"

"Could a cancer disappearing suddenly, then, take this form?"

"Nurse, you'd make a very imaginative research scientist. Certainly not! And in *his* case, it was merely a railroad accident."

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Before writing the word that must come next, I fainted.

I had written, not everything that I heard said, but as much as I had time for. At the end I fainted—I don't know how long I have been unconscious here alone. But now I must finish—must write that horrible word:

Leprosy!

The gray doctor. The hypodermic filled with a strange, filthy-smelling stuff—which he intended to shoot into *my* veins, too. Dr. Zingler, the gray doctor, the gray fiend! And I mustn't speak of these horrors, of the things I am thinking—not to anyone. . . .

My hand is shaking so that I can hardly write, and I am sobbing—dry, tearing sobs like those of the nurse this morning. But mine are not soundless as hers were—I must put this book away, for I am losing all control of myself—someone is coming. . . .

Chart of patient Marion Wheaton, November 28, 1929. Delirious as result of recent catastrophes in hospital. Shows mental aberration as well, however, accusing one of the house doctors of horrible and fantastic crimes. Ordered detained for observation a short while, then, failing improvement, transfer to a psychopathic institution. The house doctor who is the subject of the patient's hallucination has been kept from her presence. Dr. Rountree is given permission to take the patient out in his car when the weather permits

Diary of Marion Wheaton, November 29, 10 P. M. I am keeping this small notebook always in the pocket of my dressing gown now. I have a feeling that it may some day furnish important evidence—perhaps after I have been locked up in an insane asylum, or perhaps after I am dead. The latter seems to be most likely. More and more as the moments pass, I feel that my life while I stay here is hanging by a thread. Removal, even to the hospital for the insane, would be merciful; I doubt if I shall live to know that mercy.

This evening Dr. Rountree took me for the ride which was to have calmed my nerves. Thank God, he at least knows that my mind is not unhinged. He even talks to me freely of the things which are supposed to be kept from me—and that goes far to restore my mental balance and self-confidence.

"I can't understand your feeling about Zingler," he said. "I find him a likeable chap. However—just try again, try still harder, not to refer to that feeling.

"And I know there's no reason for all this whispering behind your back. Today, for instance—you've heard them talking all day over some new excitement, I know. As a matter of fact, it's leaked out; everyone in the hospital has heard of it. It's this. Those two patients in 19 and 26 have developed leprosy in an unheard-of manner—as though a noxious plant were to strike root in soil where it had not been sown, and to grow to maturity in the passing of a night. An unheard-of change in human tissues!

"However, today's new mystery is merely this: the man in 26 has been removed to a leper colony; the woman in 19, however, has—disappeared."

I gave a sudden, startled cry.

"No—no!" he reassured me, quickly. "Not another murder tragedy—simply and really a disappearance. Her husband seems completely mystified; but somehow, someone has saved her from incarceration, I suppose. A pity too, since leprosy may now often be cured."

I leaned back in my seat. The sea wind was in my face—I felt relaxed for the first time in days. But of course—I couldn't forget the things in both our minds.

"I don't want any horrible details," I said. "But about the—the little baby was who—kidnaped—was there, that time, any clue at all?"

Vincent Rountree nodded. "One clue, pointing to the hypothesis that the maniac may be a religious fanatic," he said shortly. "On a flat part of the roof, a sort of altar—"

I wondered. Would a doctor of medicine be likely to be a religious fanatic? Could I, after all, be wrong?

I felt myself shaking, and he felt it too as his arm touched mine.

"Try to forget!" he urged. "There are, after all, other things—things of beauty. Night—stars—the sea"—his last word was shaped soundlessly rather than spoken; I thought that it was—"you!"

He parked the car near the beach. I am able to walk with a cane now, and so I took his arm and we walked along the sand.

God! We walked along the sand!

It was I who saw first, caught against one of the dry rocks of a jetty above the level of high tide—something. Something—a hank of white fuzz in the starlight. No, not exactly fuzz. A hank, grayish white, of something like human hair.

A hank of gray-white hair, roughly or carelessly torn from a woman's head.

It was Vincent, then, who saw how the sand was tumbled and rough and uneven, in an irregular patch some six feet long and two or three feet wide. Six feet by two or three!

Both of us felt that it was necessary—a duty, at least—to make sure, to investigate—to *find out if there were anything hidden beneath that oblong of tumbled sand.*

I waited alone at a little distance with my back turned. Vincent came to me very soon. His face was livid in the starlight, and he looked ill.

"I am a doctor, and I've seen things—" he began. Then he pulled himself together. "We'll both be called as witnesses of this, but you must come away. It—was the woman who had cancer—who had leprosy. Her disappearance was—not an escape."

Back at the hospital, I was taken directly to my room and prepared for the night, with the usual sedative—unless, perhaps, they may have strengthened it in view of the experience I have just passed through. I have written this in bed, and will slip the book into the handkerchief pocket of the crepe de chine gown. I am wearing.

The hour for "Visitors out" has passed. The hall lights are out, except the dim light from the far end of the hall and the nearer, lurid red light that I have always disliked, as though I knew somehow that *sometime* I was to see by that light a thing that would terrify me—live through, in its glare, something more dreadful than all that has come, so far, to me myself. Is tonight the night? More than ever, I am afraid. That red light! The light of morning shining through the blood-stained skylight over the operating-room on the morning when Rodney Penning lay murdered there, must have been of such a color.

I wish that I could stay awake—tonight of all nights.

I wish by some happy miracle I could know that for this one night that gray figure was outside the hospital walls. Does a house doctor always "sleep in"?

I feel that tonight I *must* keep awake, But can I?

I can not. I—am going . . .

Last entry in Marion Wheaton's hospital diary. Written between midnight and 2 a. m., November 28. In the little time he has been gone, I have been praying for mercy. I can not feel that my prayers will be answered. Was there mercy for little Rodney Penning? For the new-born baby taken from the nursery? Was there mercy for the woman who had cancer?

There is a chance that he may overlook the small diary notepad and pencil tucked in the pocket of my nightgown with my handkerchief. In that unlikely event, this will serve as evidence.

I must hurry. At any moment he will return. He is on the roof by the skylight, and I can hear him mumbling—a sort of chant. He *has*, then, a religious mania. But the fiend is—Dr. Ziegler.

I waked to find him bending over me, and I waked too late. He crammed a large handkerchief into my mouth before terror had struggled through my stupor. But tonight, he had no hypodermic.

"A large bait—*It* must want a larger sacrifice," he was saying. And his eyes—I swear they were not human, somehow. They were as ruthlessly cruel as the eyes of a serpent.

Pressing the handkerchief down my throat so that I was half strangled, he dragged me from my bed and carried me down the hall. And Miss Wurt saw us—she passed by the stairs just as he started to mount them, and she saw us, and started back in horror. But she made no move to help me, only shrank away. Nor has she given any alarm, for—God pity me!—I have been strapped to the operating-table by ankles and body for fully half an hour, waiting for his return with that sharp knife he chose before he went out and somehow reached the roof and began putting about up there—and chanting.

By turns he called me a "bait" and a "sacrifice." Yes, the gray doctor is a fiend—a mad fiend! He will butcher me here, and I shall die trying to scream, with this gag in my mouth; I'll die in agony and terror unspeakable—and he will merely be locked up somewhere afterward.

His voice is rising as he chants. Soon, now—

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He is worse than a fiend and a maniac. He is in league with supernal powers of evil.

As he chanted, I saw for a little while, through the skylight—a *Thing*. I can think of no word for it. It seemed to swoop down suddenly, as from a great distance—as though a monster had emerged from the cold abyss between the stars. And it was monster-size, so that I saw only a little part of it—and that was a sort of huge, pulsing projection which

seemed to press against the skylight—and in which there was something that might have been either eye or mouth—I believe it to be both. A mouth that sees; an eye that may devour.

The gray doctor must not have expected his celestial visitant quite so soon; for I heard running feet on the roof—and now I hear him outside the door of the operating-room, fumbling with the lock. He had locked it after. It will take but an instant—

May God—Who surely reigns supreme somewhere beyond such foul blasphemies as haunt space—have mercy on my soul!

And if this testimony is accepted, do not treat Dr. Zingler as an ordinary maniac. He is—

Excerpt from the testimony of Nurse Wurt, following her confession. Of course I knew that "the gray doctor," was not Dr. Zingler, though I was on night duty and Dr. Zingler was seldom on the floor at night.

This stranger appeared—I didn't know how. He made love to me. I had never been noticed in that way before. Some women never are. The other nurses had affairs—I never.

I let him frequent my floor against the regulations. When the first crime occurred—I did not believe it was he. A little later, I would not believe it. Still later, I was afraid—afraid of him, and afraid to confess that at such a time I had been allowing the presence on my floor at night of a man utterly unknown to me—to anyone.

When he carried Miss Wheaton up the stairs. I knew—I feared—but I was afraid *then* to cry out.

Statement of Dr. Rountree made before the Hospital Committee of investigation. I am laying before the committee the confession of the Gray Killer, as he has come to be called—or "The Gray Doctor", as Miss Wheaton called him—poor girl, when to peril of her life the hospital authorities saw fit to add the peril of being judged insane. It will be remembered that no confession could be forced from the Killer by the police; that I alone was able to obtain his remarkable statement, spurred by my anxiety to substantiate the statements made in those lines written in Miss Wheaton's diary on the operating-table. Those lines have been called "ravings". And out of the regard I had come to have for Miss Wheaton while she was a patient here and out of the deep confidence I felt in her judgment, I determined to seek corroboration for those very statements which must naturally appear the most unsupportable.

Her confusion of the Killer, whose confession is appended below,

with Dr. Zingler, is most natural. She had never seen Dr. Zingler, and after she had encountered and conceived a horror of the Killer, Dr. Zingler was kept from her room. She naturally felt assured that Miss Wurt would have known of the habitual presence of any stranger, and so accepted the Killer's statement as to his identity.

Out of the depths of my anxiety to substantiate Miss Wheaton's story, I have done a difficult thing—approached the Killer in the guise of a friend. I obtained—a confession. And before this confession is judged to be utterly beyond the bounds of possibility, I will ask urgently that two things be explained away—the *feet of the Killer*—and *his manner of cheating the law*.

The Confession. Never again shall I return home, and it is all in vain. Nevertheless, easily can I escape the pit into which I have dug my way. There is always the ultimate way out.

Even to me, who can regard all of the race of Earth as so many stupid cattle, the enmity that surrounds me now grows heavy to bear. Also, why should one suffer punishment and death at the hands of inferiors? But before I enter the great oblivion I will give my story to Dr. Rountree, who alone has dealt with me as with a man of knowledge, and not a crazy man whose wits have gone astray.

Know, then, that my home is not upon Earth, but rather on Horil, a world which circles a sun that burns beyond the narrow limits of this galaxy. Is the planet Earth then unknown to the dwellers of Horil? No, for the astronomers of Horil compare with those of Earth as Earth's greatest astronomer might compare with a child with an opera glass.

On Horil, I was for eleven centuries high priest to the Devil-God of Space. (I approximate terms familiar to men of Earth). We of Horil believe that a great Power of Good has created all things, and that He is opposed by a lesser Power of Evil. But we worship at no shrine to an Unknown God on Horil—and the Devil-God of Space is very real, and one of the most dreaded of those strange beings that infest the trackless ether.

Its characteristics? As to form of worship, a love of human sacrifice. To many an altar on Horil it has descended, to snatch thence living food.

Its form and nature?

The biologists of Horil are far in advance of those of Earth, as you shall see. Yet even they do not understand the nature of the great denizens of Space. They may breathe ether—they may be forms of vibrat

energy, and know no need to breathe, being electro-chemical in their nature. But—whether or not the Devil-God breathes—it *sms*.

As to form—here is coincidence for the philosophers of Earth to ponder, parallel to that phenomenon by which unrelated race of Earth find for the same things names built on similar phonetic principles. The form of the Devil-God of Horil and of Space resembles that of the monster of the deep which men on Earth have named the devil-fish. Miss Wheaton described truly the appearance of one of its monster tentacles, and she was right in her surmise that the orifice on the end serves both as mouth and eye.

So. My deity was a being of definite power and substance, of knowledge of the far corners of the universe, and of great evil. To Horil it may have been drawn by the psychic nature of our people. We have grown mighty in knowledge while retaining habits common on Earth only to the most primitive races. Cannibalism is practiced universally on Horil. The Devil-God loves human sacrifice and the slaying of men and women. Hence the Devil-God came to haunt the altars of Horil, its temples and the hearts of its men and women. You of Earth would say that evil attracts evil.

And for eleven centuries I was its high priest. On Horil the only death comes by way of cannibalism, or an occasional suicide, since we have done away with accidental death. Yet, sooner or later, men on Horil die. It is one's turn to furnish food for others, for life grows weary—so does life equalize itself among those who might otherwise become immortal; balancing knowledge and character of destructive traits, perhaps, that the eternal plan of the great Unknown be not thwarted.

But this is not to the point.

At last I offended the Devil-God. I stole from his altar—well, she was beautiful, and the gray pallor of her skin was like the early dawn-light. Love is rare on Horil—but it had me in its grip.

After I had loosed her from the altar we dared not go into the City—she would have been returned to the altar, and I should have furnished a feast for the royal family. We fled into the barren places. And the Devil-God, returning to its altar, saw us and overtook us in a great, empty, stony field. There *she*, the beloved, was seized and devoured before my eyes. And I—

No such mercy was intended for the faithless high priest of the altar of human sacrifice. I was caught up—gently—in one of the monster tentacles. The wide, barren plain lit by the cold stars fell away beneath me—shrunk to the size of a handkerchief. An entire hemisphere of Horil

lay like a saucer holding the sky—then shrank too, and fell away. My sense left me, and the breath of my nostrils. Then—

I was lying in a field on the planet Earth, which I soon recognized by the customs and types of its inhabitants, from my knowledge of schoolroom astronomy. How did I survive the journey through space? Who knows? Ask of the Devil-God, Which has—perhaps—no words for all its knowledge.

I would not starve—I, an eater of human flesh. But here another thing must be explained. On Horii we prepare human flesh for consumption. Countless centuries ago our epicures evolved a taste for the flesh of leprous persons. Through constant usage, we have come to eat no other flesh—and by some physiological idiosyncrasy, our stomachs became unadapted to other flesh. I can eat non-leprous flesh—but it inflicts on me fearful pangs of nausea.

Our biologists, then, developed a specific which implants a swift-growing culture of leprosy in any flesh into which it is injected—and which at the same time cures and restores all bodily tissues suffering from any other injury. So our health is safeguarded. And hence the cure of the man in 26, and the woman in 19, who had cancer. Hence the sudden development of leprosy in these patients. For they were to give me needed food.

Hence, the buried and mutilated body in the sand; I was starving, famished.

The sacrifices on the roof altar, on the other hand, were sacrifices of propitiation; but the improvised "fishhooks"—

I madly hoped to snare the Devil-God I served—as men on Earth of primitive tribes, so I have heard, turn upside down the images of their saints to force them to their bidding. But I dared more—hoping literally to hook the monster with the steel barb and cable.

Two sacrifices it scorned.

Driven by hunger, I had prepared my necessary feast. The girl with deep blue eyes that grew sad and terrified as they gazed on me was my first selection. Obedient to a true instinct, however, she shunned me. So I prepared the man and woman for myself—and sacrificed the children.

Then a new thought came to me. My sacrifices had been too small. They should have matched my own necessity. I determined to raise once more an altar on the roof, and to fasten to it the slain body of the girl with the sad terrified eyes.

I crept upon her as she slept at last a sleep so deep that the sense of my nearness failed to rouse her, as it had done before. I gagged her and carried her from her room, half smothering her as her sad eyes implored. Even to me, she was pitifully beautiful; the better to allure the Monster-God of Space.

I conveyed her—as she wrote down—to the operating-room, and strapped her to the table—leaving free her hands, since she had little strength and could not loose herself with her body fastened flat to the table, and I had need to hasten.

I offered up my prayers upon the roof—the prayers I had made before the altars of Horth through eleven centuries.

The Being—the Monster—swooped down out of the "empty" skies—the "empty" skies that teem with the Unseen and the Unknowable.

I hastened back from the roof, to the operating-room. I threw myself, knife in hand, upon the operating-table—

And I was seized from behind!

Miss Wurt at last had dared to give the alarm. No sacrifice was made upon the roof again. And I was taken captive—though soon I shall escape.

Comment by the Superintendent of R— Hospital, signed before witnesses at the request of Dr. Rountree and Marion Wheaton. The "Confession" of the unknown man captured almost in the act of murdering Miss Wheaton upon an operating-table in our hospital is beyond credence.

Nevertheless, I hereby testify to two things. The Killer's entrances and exits were made through unnoticed back windows which were not near stairs or fire escapes. This was possible, because he *scaled* the walls of the building—not climbing them, but *walking up them*. When his shoes were removed, his feet appeared as long segments of the bodies of serpents—and they could grip and scale any kind of wall. His feet, he said, were as the feet of all "human" beings on Horth; and "on Earth" his shoes were made specially, and his feet were coiled within these shoes!

Likewise the manner of his suicide is beyond explanation. He had been searched and was guarded carefully, of course, and he died—simply by holding his breath. No living thing on Earth has been known to do this thing, since at a certain degree of weakness the will is replaced by automatic functions.

To the physiologic norm of no known species of Earth could the Killer conform.

The Scar

by J. Ramsey Campbell

J. RAMSEY CAMPBELL was hailed by August Derleth as "the youngest and one of the most effective recruits to the Cthulhu Mythos", when his collection, *The Inhabitant of the Lake and Less Welcome Tenants*, was published by Arkham House a few years back. He has since appeared in some of the Arkham House anthologies, edited by Mr. Derleth, and has gained a considerable and entirely merited reputation amongst lovers of weird and bizarre fiction. That he not better known here in general is due to the absence of suitable markets for his unique and well-written tales.

"IT WAS MOST ODD on the bus today," Lindsay Rice said. Jack Rossitor threw his cigarette into the fire and lit another. His wife Harriet glanced at him uneasily; she could see he was in no mood for her brother's rambling.

"Most odd," said Lindsay. "Rather upsetting, in fact. It reminded me, the Germans—now was it the Germans? Yes, I think it was the Germans—used to have this thing about *doppelgangers*, the idea being that

According to legend, if you met your double, you would die soon; but it was Rossitor's brother-in-law who met Jack Rossitor's double. And the double had a nasty scar . . .

if you saw your double it meant you were going to die. But of course you didn't see him. That's right, of course, I should explain."

Jack moved in his armchair. "I'm sorry, Lindsay," he interrupted, "I just don't see where you're tending. I'm sorry."

"It's all right, Lindsay," Harriet said. "Jack's been a bit tired lately. Go on."

But at that moment the children tumbled into the room like pterrots, their striped pajamas bold against the pastel lines of wallpaper. "Douglas tried to throw me into the bath, and he hasn't brushed his teeth!" Elaine shouted triumphantly.

"There'll be spankings for two in a minute," Jack threatened, but he didn't mean it. "Good night, darling. Good night, darling. No, you've had a hard day, darling. I'll put them to bed."

"Not so hard as you," Harriet said, standing up. "You stay and talk to Lindsay."

Jack grimaced inwardly; he had wanted Harriet to rest, but somehow it now appeared as if he'd been trying to escape Lindsay. "Sorry, Lindsay, you were saying?" he prompted as the thumping on the staircase ceased.

"Oh, yes, on the bus. Well, it was this morning, I saw someone who looked like you. I was going to speak to him until I realized." Rice glanced round the room; although his weekly invitation was of some years' standing, he could never remember exactly where everything was. Armchairs, television, bookcase full of Penguins and book-duh editions and Shorrocks's *Valuer's Manual*—there it was, on top of the bookcase, the wedding photograph which Jack had carefully framed for Harriet. "Yes, he was as thin as you've been getting, but he had a scar from here to here." Rice encompassed his left temple and jawbone with finger and thumb like dividers.

"So he wasn't really my double. My time hasn't run out after all."

"Well, I hope not!" Rice laughed a little too long; Jack felt his mouth stretching as he forced it to be sociable. "We've been slackening off at the office," Rice said. "How are things at the jeweller's? Nothing stolen yet, I hope?"

"No, everything's under control," Jack replied. Feet ran across the floor above. "Hang on, Lindsay," he said, "sounds like Harriet's having trouble."

Harriet had quelled the rebellion when he arrived; she closed the door of the children's room and regarded him. "God! the man's tact!" he exploded.

"Shh, Jack, he'll hear you." She put her arms round him. "Don't be cruel to Lindsay," she pleaded. "You know I always had the best of everything and Lindsay never did — unhappy at school, always being put down by my father, never daring to open his mouth — darling, you know he finds it difficult to talk to people. Now I've got you. Surely we can spare him kindness at least."

"Of course we can." He stroked her hair. "It's just that — goddam it, not only does he say I'm losing weight as though I'm being underfed or something, but he asks me if the shop has been broken into yet!"

"Poor darling, don't worry. I'm sure the police will catch them before they ever raid the shop. And if not, there's always insurance."

"Sure there's insurance, but it won't rebuild my display! Can't you understand I take as much pride in the shop as you take in the house? Probably some jumped-up little teddy-boys who throw the loot away when their tarts have played with it!"

"That doesn't sound like you at all, Jack," Harriet said.

"I'm sorry, darling. You know I'm really here. Come on, I'd better fix up tomorrow night with Lindsay."

"If you feel like a rest we could have him round here."

"No, he opens out a bit when he's in a pub. Besides, I like the walk to Lower Brixchester."

"Just so long as you come back in one piece, my love."

Rice heard them on the stairs. He hurried back to his chair from the bookcase where he'd been inspecting the titles. One of these days he must offer to lend them some books — anything to make them like him more. He knew he'd driven Jack upstairs. Why couldn't he be direct instead of circling the point like a wobbling whirlingig? But every time he tried to grasp an intention or a statement it slid out of reach. Even if he hung a sign on his bedroom wall — he'd once thought of one: "I shall act directly" — he'd forget it before he left the flat. Even as he forgot his musings when Jack and Harriet entered the room.

"I'd better be off," he said. "You can never tell with the last bus round here."

"I'll see you tomorrow night, then," Jack told him, patting his shoulder. "I'll call round and pick you up."

But he never had the courage to invite them to his flat, Lindsay thought; he knew it wasn't good enough for them. Not that they'd show it — they'd do everything to hide their feelings out of kindness, which would be worse. Tomorrow night as usual he'd be downstairs only to wait for Jack in the doorway. He waved to them as they stood

linked in their bright frame, then struck off down the empty road. The fields were gray and silent, and above the semi-detached roofs the moon was set in a plush ring of cold November mist. At the bus-stop he thought: I wish I could do something for them so they'd be grateful to me.

Harriet was bending over the cooker; she heard no footsteps—she had no chance to turn before the newspaper was over her face.

"I see the old Jack's back with us," she said, fighting off the *Brixchester Herald*.

"You haven't seen it?" He guided her hand to the headline: *Youths Arrested—Admit to Jewel Theft*. He was beaming; he read the report again as Harriet took it in, the three boys who'd hoped to stockpile jewelry but had been unable to market it without attracting the police. "Maybe now we can all get some sleep," he said. "Maybe I can give up smoking."

"Don't give it up for me, Jack, I know you need it. But if you *did* give it up I'd be very happy."

Douglas and Elaine appeared in search of tea. "Now just you sit down and wait," Jack told them, "or we'll eat it for you."

After tea Jack lit a cigarette, then glanced at Harriet. "Don't worry, darling," she advised. "Take things easy for a while. Come on, children, you can help clear up." She knew the signs—spilled sugar, dropped knife; Jack would turn hypertense if he didn't rest.

But ten minutes later he was in the kitchen. "Must go," he said. "Give myself time for a stroll before I meet Lindsay. Anyway, the news ought to give the conversation a lift."

"Come back whole, darling," said Harriet, not knowing.

Yes, he liked to walk through Lower Brixchester. He'd made the walk, with variations, for almost two years; ever since his night out drinking with Rice had settled into habit. It had been his suggestion, primarily to please Harriet, for he knew she liked to think he and Lindsay were friends; but by now he met Lindsay out of a sense of duty, which was never proof against irritation as the evening wore on. Never mind, there was the walk. If he felt insecure, as he usually did when walking, he gained a paradoxical sense of security from Lower Brixchester; the bleared fish-and-chip shop windows, the crowds outside pubs, a drunk punching someone's face with a soft moist sound—it reassured him to think that here was a level to which he could never be reduced.

Headlights blazed down a side-street, billowing with mist and motor-

eyde fumes. They spotlighted a broken wall across the street from Rossiter; a group of girls huddled on the shattered brick, laughing forth fog as the motorcycle gang fondled them with words. Rossiter gazed at them; no doubt the jewel thieves had been of the same mold. He felt a little guilty as he watched the girls, embracing to keep out the cold; but he had his answer ready—no amount of money would change them, they were fixed; if he had money, it was because he could use it properly. He turned onward; he'd have to use the alley on the right if he were not to keep Rice waiting.

Suddenly the shrieks of laughter behind the roaring engines were cut off. A headlight felt its way along the walls, finding one house protruding part of some ruined frontage like a piece of jigsaw, the next shuttered with corrugated tin which had been torn down from the doorway, its neighbor dismally curtained. Briefly the beam followed a figure; a man in a long black coat swaying along the pavement, a gray woolen sock pulled down over his face. The girls drew closer, silently, Jack shuddered; the exploratory progress of the figure seemed unformed, undirected. Then the light was gone; the girls giggled in the darkness, and beyond a streetlamp the figure fumbled into the tin-shuttered house. Jack turned up his collar and hurried into the alley. The engines roared louder.

He was halfway up the alley when he heard the footsteps. The walls were narrow; there was barely room for the other, who seemed in a hurry, to pass. Jack pressed against the wall; it was cold and rough beneath his hand. Behind him the footsteps stopped.

He looked back. The entrance to the alley whirled with fumes, against which a figure moved toward him, vaguely outlined. It held something in its hand. Jack felt automatically for his lighter. Then the figure spoke.

"You're Jack Rossiter," The voice was soft but somehow penetrated the overwhelming scales of the motorcycles. "I'll be visiting your shop soon."

For a moment Jack thought he must know the man, though his face was merely a black egg in the shadows; but something in the figure's slow approach warned him. Suddenly he knew what that remark implied. Cold rushed into his stomach, and metal glinted in the figure's hand. Jack retreated along the wall, his fingers searching frantically for a door. His feet tangled with an abandoned tin; he kicked it toward the figure and ran.

The fog boiled round him; metal clattered; a foot hooked his ankle

and tripped him. The engines were screaming; as Jack raised his head a car's beam thrust into his eyes. He scrambled at potato peelings and sardine tins and struggled to his knees. A foot between his shoulders ground him down. The car's light dimmed and vanished. He struggled onto his back, cold peel sticking to his cheek, and the foot pressed on his heart. The metal closed in the figure's palm. Above him hands displayed the tin which he had kicked. The insidious voice said something. Rossiter tore at the leg in horror and fury. The black egg bent nearer. The foot pressed harder, and the rusty lid of the tin came down toward Jack's face.

Though the bandage was off he could still feel the cut, blazing now and then from his temple to his jawbone. He forced himself to forget; he banked the living-room fire and opened his book. But it failed to soothe him. Don't brood, he told himself savagely, worse is probably happening to someone in Lower Brichester right now. If only Harriet hadn't seen him unbandaged at the hospital! He could feel her pain more keenly than his own since he'd come home. He kept thinking of her letting the kettle scream so he wouldn't hear her sobbing in the kitchen. Then she'd brought his coffee, her face still wet beneath her hair from water to wash away the tears. Why had he told her at the hospital—"It's not what he did to me, Harriet, it's what he said he'd do to Douglas and Elaine"? He cursed himself for spreading more suffering than he himself had had to stand. Even Rice had seemed to feel himself obscurely to blame, though Jack had insisted that it was his own fault for walking through that area.

"Go and say goodnight to Daddy," Harriet called.

The children padded in. "Daddy's face is getting better," Elaine said.

He saw the black egg bearing down on them. God, he swore, if he should lay one finger—! "Daddy's surviving his accident," he told them. "Goodnight, children."

Presently he heard Harriet slowly descending the stairs, each step a thought. Suddenly she rushed into the room and hid her face on his chest. "Oh, please, please, darling, what did he say about the children?" she sobbed.

"I won't have you disturbed, my love," he said, holding her as she trembled. "I can worry enough for both of us. And as long as you take them there and back to school, it doesn't matter what the sod said."

"And what about your shop?" she asked through her tears.

"Never mind the shop!" He tried not to think of his dream of the

smashed window, of the foul disorder he might find one morning. "The police will find him, don't you worry."

"But you couldn't even describe—" The doorbell rang. "Oh, God, it's Lindsay," she said. "Could you go, darling? I can't let him see me like this."

"Oh, that's good—I mean I'm glad you've got the bandage off," said Lindsay. Behind him fog swallowed the bedraggled trees and blotted out the fields. He stared at Jack, then muttered: "Sorry, better let you close the door."

"Come in and get some fire," Jack said. "Harriet will have the coffee ready in a minute."

Rice plodded round the room, then sat down opposite Jack. He stared at the wedding photograph. He rubbed his hands and gazed at them. He looked up at the ceiling. At last he turned to Jack: "What—" he glanced around wildly—"what's that you're reading?"

"*The Heart of the Matter*. Second time, in fact. You should try it sometime."

Harriet looked in, dabbing at one eye. "Think I rubbed in some soap," she explained. "Hello, Lindsay. If we're talking about books, Jack, you said you would read *The Lord of the Rings*."

"Well, I can't now, darling, since I'm working tomorrow. Back to work at last, Lindsay. Heaven knows what sort of a state the shop will be in with Phillips in charge."

"You always said you could rely on him in an emergency," Harriet protested.

"Well, this is the test. Yes, white as usual for me, please, darling."

Harriet withdrew to the kitchen. "I read a book this week," Rice caught at the conversation, "about a man—what's his name, no, I forget—whose friend is in danger from someone, he finds out—and he finally pulls this someone off a cliff and gets killed himself." He was about to add: "At least he did something with himself. I don't like books about people failing," but Jack took the cue.

"A little unrealistic for me," he said, "after what happened."

"Oh, I never asked," Rice's hands gripped each other, "where did it?"

"Just off the street parallel to yours, the next but two. In the alley."

"But that's where—" he lost something again—"where there's all sorts of violence."

"You shouldn't live so near it, Lindsay," Harriet said above a tray.

"Can't you get out?"

"Depressing night," Jack remarked as he helped Rice don his coat. "Drop that book in sometime, Lindsay. I'd like to read it."

Of course he wouldn't, Rice thought as he breathed in the curling fog and met the trees forming in the murk; he was trying to be kind. Rice had failed again. Why had he been unable to speak, to tell Jack that he had seen his double leave the bus and enter an abandoned house opposite that alley? The night of the mutilation Rice had waited in his doorway, feeling forsaken, sure that Jack had decided not to come; ashamed now, he blamed himself—Jack would be whole now if Rice hadn't made him feel it was his duty to meet him. Something was going to happen; he sensed it looming. If he could only warn them, prevent it—but prevent what? He saw the figures falling from the cliff-top against the azure sky, the seagulls screaming round them—but the mist hung about him miserably, stifling his intentions. He began to hurry to the bus stop.

The week unfolded wearily. It was as formless in Rice's mind as the fields when he walked up the Rossiters' street again, his book collecting droplets in his hand. He rang the bell and waited, shivering, the windows were blurred by mist.

"Oh, Lindsay," said Harriet. She had run to the door; it was clear she had been crying. "I don't know whether—"

Jack appeared in the hall, one hand possessively gripping the living-room doorframe, the cigarette upon his lip flaking down his shirt. "Well, look who's here," he said harshly. "Did we invite you for tonight? I thought it'd be early to bed for us. Come in for God's sake, don't freeze us to death."

Harriet threw Lindsay a pleading look which he could not interpret. "Sorry," he apologized. "I didn't know you were tired."

"Who said tired? Come on, man, start thinking! God, I give up." Jack threw up his hands and whirled into the living-room.

"Lindsay, Jack's been having a terrible time. The shop was broken into last night."

"What's all that whispering?" a voice shouted. "Aren't I one of the family any more?"

"Jack don't be illogical. Surely Lindsay and I can talk." But she motioned Lindsay into the living-room.

"I'm an outsider now, is that it?"

Lindsay dropped the book. Suddenly he'd realized what he'd seen;

Jack's face was paler, thinner than last week; the scar looked older than seemed possible. He bent for the book. No, what he was thinking was incredible; Harriet would have noticed. Jack was simply worried. It must be worry.

"Brought me a book, have you? Come on, let's see it. Oh, for God's sake, Lindsay, I can't waste my time with this sort of thing!"

"Jack!" cried Harriet. "Lindsay brought it specially."

"Don't be kind to Lindsay, he won't thank you for it. You think we're patronizing you, don't you Lindsay? Inviting you to our expensive house?"

This couldn't be, Rice thought; not in this pastel livingroom, not with the wedding photograph fixed forever; their lives were solid, not ephemeral like his own. "I—don't know what you mean," he faltered.

"Jack, I won't have you speaking to Lindsay like that," Harriet said. "Lindsay, would you help me make the coffee?"

"Siding with your brother now," Jack accused. "I don't need him at a time like this, I need you. You've forgotten the shop already, but I haven't. I can't. I suppose I needn't expect any comfort tonight."

"Oh, Jack, try and get a grip on yourself," but now her voice was softer. Don't! Lindsay warned her frantically. That's exactly what he wants! But Jack was her husband—how could he be deceiving her?

"Take your book, Lindsay," Jack said through his fingers, "and make sure you're invited in future." Harriet glanced at him in anguish and ushered Lindsay out.

"I'm sorry you've been hurt, Lindsay," she said. "Of course you're always welcome here. You know we love you. Jack didn't mean it. I knew something would happen when I heard about the shop, but I didn't know it would be like this—" Her voice broke. "Maybe you'd better not come again until Jack's more stable. I'll tell you when it's over. You do understand, don't you?"

"Of course, it doesn't matter." Lindsay noticed a newspaper on the hall table; he saw the headline—*Jeweler's Raided—Displays Destroyed*. "Can I have the paper?" he asked.

"Take it, please. I'll get in touch with you, I promise. Don't lose heart."

As the door closed Rice heard Jack call "Harriet!" in what sounded like despair. Above, the children were silhouetted on their bedroom window; as Rice trudged away the fog engulfed them. At the bus stop he read the report; a window broken, destruction everywhere. He gazed ahead blindly. Shafts of bilious yellow pierced the fog, then the gray

returned. "Start thinking", was it? Oh, yes, he could think—think how easy it would be to fake a raid, knowing the insurance would rebuild what was destroyed—but he didn't want the implications; the idea was insane, anyway. Who would destroy simply in order to have an excuse for appearing emaciated, unstable? But his thoughts returned to Harriet; he avoided thinking what might be happening in that house. You're just jealous! he tried to tell himself. He's her *husband*! He has the right! Rice became aware that he was holding the book which he had brought for Jack—the sacrifice on the cliff-top. He held it up, then thrust it into the litter-bin between empty tins and a sherry bottle. He stood waiting in the fog.

The fog trickled through Rice's kitchen window. He leaned his weight on it, but again it refused to shut. He shrugged helplessly and tipped the beans into the saucepan. The tap dripped once; he gripped it and screwed it down. Below the window someone came out coughing and shattered something in the dustbin. The tap dripped. He moved toward it, and the bell rang.

It was Harriet in a headscarf. "Oh, don't come in," he said. "It's not fit, I mean—"

"Don't be silly, Lindsay," she told him edgily. "Let me in." Her eyes gathered details: the twig-like crack in one corner of the ceiling, the alarm-clock whose hand had been amputated, the cobweb supporting the lamp-flex from the ceiling like a bracket. "But this is so depressing," she said. "Don't stay here, Lindsay. You must escape."

"It doesn't look too good because the bed's not made," he tried to explain, but he could see her despairing. He had to turn the subject. "Jack all right?" he asked, then remembered, but too late.

She pulled off her headscarf. "Lindsay, he hasn't been himself since they wrecked the shop," she said with determined calm. "Rows all the time, breaking things—he broke our photograph. He goes out and gets drunk half the evenings. I've never seen him so irrational." Her voice faded. "And there are other things—that I can't tell you about—"

"That's awful. That's terrible." He couldn't bear to see Harriet like this; she was the only one he had ever loved. "Couldn't you get him to see someone, I mean—"

"We've already had a row about that. That was when he broke the photograph."

"How about the children? How's he been to them?" Instantly two pieces fitted together; he waited, chill with horror, for her answer.

"He tells them off for playing, but I can protect them."

How could she be so blind? "Suppose he should do something to them," he said. "You'll have to get out."

"That's one thing I won't do," she told him. "He's my husband, Lindsay. It's up to me to look after him."

She can't believe that! Lindsay cried. He tottered on the edge of revelation, and fought with his tongue. "Don't you think he's acting as if he was a different person?" He could not be more explicit.

"After what happened that's not so surprising." She drew her headscarf through her fingers and pulled it back, drew and pulled, drew and pulled; Lindsay looked away. "He's left all the displays in Phillips' hands. He's breaking down, Lindsay. I've got to nurse him back. He'll survive, I know he will."

Survive! Lindsay thought with bitterness and horror. And suddenly he remembered that Harriet had been upstairs when he'd described the meeting on the bus; she'd never realize, and his tongue would never move to tell her. Behind her compassion he sensed a terrible devotion to Jack which he could not break. She was trapped as he was in his flat. Yet if he could not speak, he must act. The plan against him was clear: he'd been banished from the Rossiters' house, he wasn't able to protest, Harriet would be alone. And this revealed the one plan of action left to him. He gazed at Harriet; she would never understand, but perhaps she needn't suspect.

The beans sputtered and smoldered in the pan. "Oh, Lindsay, I'm awfully sorry," Harriet said. "You must have your tea. I've got to get back before he comes home. I only called to tell you not to come round for a while. Please don't, I'll be all right."

"I'll stay away until you tell me," Lindsay lied. As she reached the hall he called out; he felt bound to make what would happen as easy as he could for her. "If anything should happen—" he fumbled—"you know, while Jack's—disturbed—I can always help to look after the children."

Rice could hear the children screaming from the end of the street. He began to walk toward the cries. He hadn't meant to go near the house; if his plan were to succeed, Harriet must not see him. Harriet—why wasn't she protecting the children? It couldn't be the Rossiters' house, he argued desperately; sounds couldn't reach the length of the street. But the cries continued, piercing with terror and pain; they dragged his footsteps nearer. He reached the house and could no longer doubt.

The bedrooms were curtained, the house was impossibly impassive, reflecting no part of the horror within; fog hung grayly to the grass like scum on reeds. He could hear Elaine sobbing something and then screaming. Rice wanted to break in, to stop the sounds, to discover what was holding Harriet back; but if he went in his plan would be destroyed. His palms prickled; he wavered miserably.

The front door of the next house opened and a man—portly, red-faced, bespectacled, gray hair, black overcoat, valise—strode down the path, grinning at the screams. He passed Rice and turned at his aghast expression: "What's the matter, friend," he asked with amusement in his voice, "never have your behind tanned when you were a kid?"

"But listen to them!" Rice said unevenly. "They're screaming!"

"And I should damn well think so, too," the other retorted. "You know Jack Rossiter? Decent chap. About as much of a sadist as I am, and his kids ran in just now when we were having breakfast with some nonsense about their father doing something dreadful to them. I grabbed them by the scruff of their necks and dragged them back. One thing wrong with Rossiter—he was too soft with those kids, and I'm glad he seems to have learned some sense. Listen, you know who taught kids to tell tales on their parents? The bloody Nazis, that's who. There'll be no kids turning into bloody Nazis in this country if I can help it!"

He moved away, glancing back at Rice as if suspicious of his affiliations. The cries had faded; perhaps a door had closed. Stunned, Rice realized that he had been seen near the house; his plan was in danger. "Well, I can't wait," he called, trying to sound casual, and hurried after the man. "I've got to catch my bus."

At the bus-stop, next to the man who was scanning the headlines and swearing, Rice watched the street for the figure he awaited, shivering with cold and indecision. A bus arrived; his companion boarded. Rice stamped his feet and stared into the distance as if awaiting another; his observer told him that he was overacting. When the bus had merged into the fog, he retraced his steps. At the corner of the street he saw the fog solidify into a striding shape, the figure he expected. His chill intensified.

"Ob, Jack, can you spare a moment?" he said, knowing that his next remark would set the seal on his plan.

"Why, it's my prodigal brother-in-law!" came in a mist steaming from the mouth beside the scar. "I thought Harriet had warned you off? I'm in a hurry."

Again Rice was caught by a compulsion to rush into the house, to

discover what had happened to Harriet. But there were the children to protect; he must make sure they would never scream again. "I saw you in Lower Brichester a few weeks ago," he said, feeling the fog obscuring security. "You were going into a ruined house."

"Why, me? It must have been my—" But the voice stopped; breath hung before the face.

Rice let his hatred drive out the words. "Your double? But then where did he go? Come on, I'll show you the house."

For a moment Rice doubted; perhaps the figure would laugh and stride into the mist, leaving him alone with his failure. But the eyes flickered. "Phillips will wonder where I am," the voice mused. "I'll have to think up some story to satisfy him."

"I think you'll be able to do that." Cold with fear as he was, Rice was still warmed by fulfillment as he sensed that he had the upper hand, that he was able to taunt as had the man on the cliff-top before the plunge. He plunged into the fog, knowing that now he would be followed.

The gray fields were abruptly blocked by a more solid anonymity, the streets of Lower Brichester, suffocating individuality, erasing it through lifetimes. Whenever he'd walked through these streets with Jack on the short route to the pub each glance of Jack's had reminded him that he was part of this anonymity, this inertia. No longer, though he told himself. Signs of life were sparse; a postman cycled creaking by; Housewives' Choice played from a window; a cat curled among milkbottles. The door was rolled down on a pinball arcade, and a girl in a cheap fur coat was leaping about in the doorway of a boutique to keep herself warm until the keys arrived. Rice felt eyes take in the girl, then revert to him; they'd watched him since the beginning of the journey, although the figure seemed to face always forward. Rice glanced at the other; he was gazing in the direction of his stride, and the scar wrinkled with a faint sneer. Soon now, Rice thought uneasily.

They passed a square foundation enshrining a rusty pram; here a bomb had blown a house asunder. The next street, Rice realized, and dug his nails into the rubber of the torch in his pocket. The blitz had almost bypassed Brichester; here and there one passed from curtained windows to a gaping building, rebuilt eventually in the town, neglected in Lower Brichester. Was this the key? Had someone been driven underground by blitz conditions, or had something been released by bombing? In either case, what form of camouflage would they have to adapt to live? Rice thought he knew, but he didn't want to think it through; he wanted

to put an end to it. And round a corner the abandoned house focused into view.

A car purred somewhere; the pavement was faintly numbered for hopscootch. Rice gazed about covertly; there must be nobody in sight. And at his side the figure did the same. Terrified, Rice yet had to repress a giggle. "There's the house," he said. "I suppose you'll want to go in."

"If you've got something to show me." The scar wrinkled again.

Bricks were heaped in what had been the garden. Rice could see nothing through the windows; they were shuttered with tin. A gray corrugated sheet had been peeled back from the doorway; it scraped painfully at Rice's ankle as he entered.

The light was dim; he gripped his torch. Ahead of him a staircase full of holes was illuminated by a shattered skylight. To his right a door, one panel gouged out, still hung from a hinge. He hurried into the room, kicking a stray brick.

The fireplace gaped, half curtained by a hanging strip of wallpaper. Otherwise the room was bare, no sign that anyone had been here for years. Of course the people of the neighborhood didn't have to know precisely what was here to be afraid. In the hall tin rasped. He ran into the kitchen, ahead on the left. Fog had penetrated through a broken window; it filled his mouth as he panted. Opposite the cloven sink he saw a door. He wrenched it open, and in the other room the brick clattered. Rice's hand clutched toward the back door. He tottered forward, and heard the children scream, thought once of Harriet, saw the figures on the cliff. I'm not a hero! he mouthed. Why have I done this? And the answer came: because he'd never really believed what he'd suspected. But the torch was shining, and he swung it down the steps beyond the door.

They led into a cellar; bricks were scattered on the floor, bent knives and forks, soiled plates leading the torch-beam to tattered blankets huddled against the walls, others hinted in the shadows. And in one corner lay a body, surrounded by tins and a strip of the corrugated metal. The body glistened. Trembling, his mouth gaping at the stench which thickened the air, Rice descended, and the torch's circle shrank. The man in the corner was dressed in red. Rice moved nearer. With a shock he realized that the man was naked, shining with red paint which also marked the tins and strip of metal. Suddenly he wrenched away and retched.


For a moment he was engulfed by nausea; then he heard footsteps in

the kitchen. He caught up a brick. "You've found what you expected, have you?" the voice called. Rice reached the steps, and a figure loomed above him, blotting out the light. With studied calm it felt round in the kitchen and produced a strip of corrugated tin. And Rice, focusing his horror, fear and disgust with his lifetime of inaction, threw the brick.

Rice was shaking by the time he had finished. He picked up the torch from the bottom step and as if compelled turned its beam on the two corpses. Yes, they were of the same stature—they would have been identical if the human one had had a face. Rice shuddered away from his fascination. He must get back to Harriet—it didn't matter what excuse he gave, illness or anything, so long as he saw her. He shone the beam toward the steps to light his way, and the torch was wrested from his hand.

He didn't think; he threw himself up the steps and into the kitchen. The lock and bolts on the back door had been rusted shut for years. Footsteps padded up the steps. He fell into the other room. Outside an ambulance howled its way to the hospital. Almost tripping on the brick, he reached the hall. The ambulance's blue light flashed in the doorway and passed, and a figure with a gray sock covering its face blocked the doorway.

Rice backed away. No, he thought in despair, he couldn't fail now; the fall from the cliff had ended the menace. But already he knew. He backed into something soft, and a hand closed over his mouth. The figure plodded toward him; the gray wool sucked in and out. The figure was his height, his build. He heard himself saying: "I can always help to look after the children." And as the figure grasped a brick he knew what face waited beneath the wool.



Where There's Smoke ...

by Donna Gould Welk

YEAH, MAC? BILLBOARD? What billboard? Oh, you mean the one in Times Square with the man blowing smoke rings? No, it's gone now, Mac. It just kind of disappeared. Why? Strange you should ask, my friend. Just found out from the Boss the other day . . .

HUBERT WHIPPLE WAS the sort of guy you disliked on sight. You know the type—short, pudgy, half bald, with all that baby hair around the edge of his head, those thick glasses with the steel rims, and a voice that made you think of somebody scratching a blackboard.

He was a success, though, let me tell you. He was one of the best billboard painters the East Side (or any Side) ever produced. He could've been rich, too, but he had a few problems. Well, for one thing, he played the ponies. He also drank a lot. And to top it all off, he had a chick on the side. I suppose all that is pretty normal, but he also had an ambition that hassled him something awful. Ambition can be a bad thing,

The price stated was not exactly definite, but La Biela assured Madge that he never demanded more than a client was able to pay.

DONNA GOULD WELK is no relative of the band leader, although music has always been in her life. In recent years, she has played the leads in both *Oklahoma* and *The Mikado*, as well as taking regular parts in non-musical productions. Most of her appearances, including the two above, have been at the Antrim Playhouse, a community theater in Rockland County, New York, which is now in its "thirties" so far as successive seasons are concerned. (It actually started around 1936.) The Antrim Players are all amateur from stagehand to lead, and the theater has maintained very high standards consistently in both productions and performances. If that last sentence sounds a trifle biased, perhaps it is—your editor was an active member there for eleven years, and my next-to-last appearance on the Antrim stage was in a hilarious comedy entitled *Drink To Me Only*, wherein Donna played the belly-dancer who may or may not have been an Indian princess—who cares? In those days, her name was still Gould; now she is welcoming the return of Lt. Welk of the Air Force from Pakistan, and will be accompanying him to a Western state where he'll spend the balance of his time in military service.

you know. Take Julius Caesar, for instance. Where did all his ambition get him, huh? Oh, not that Hubert wanted to conquer the world—I don't think he had enough brains to think up anything that big—he just wanted to paint that billboard you asked me about, the one in Times Square. He just had to get the contract to restore that billboard.

And the way it looked, this could be the year he'd do it, too. After all, it was only March, and he'd already won a Daily Double at Hialeah and a couple of long shots at Santa Anita—and blown the whole bundle at Harry's Haven, the bar where he'd met Toni Sanders.

Talk about luck! Just six weeks ago he'd walked into Harry's and practically knocked her off her stool. *Her*—platinum topped curves ending like Lassie. And for some strange and wonderful reason, she loved him. Him—little Hubie Whipple, with a worn-out wife and four unbelievably noisy and grubby kids.

Yeah, this might be the year. So far, every billboard he'd bid on had been his. Well, you couldn't count the Brix that Jamison beat him out on, because everybody knew Jamison was shacking up with ol man Brix's daughter, and was even talking marriage. One look at that chick and you knew why Brix was thankful for anything anyone threw her way. So that didn't count.

And the restoration job for that cigarette billboard was coming up in April. He couldn't miss—not this year.

THE APARTMENT WAS pretty awful. Madge had tried to brighten it up with paper flowers and reprints, but they only made it look worse. And Madge looked about the same way. Not that she had ever been really beautiful, or even pretty, but she'd always been attractive and neat. After four kids and about five misses, though, she was lumpy in all the wrong places and sagged everywhere else. She looked kind of like an old armchair.

What was worse, she knew it. She had tried her best to be a good wife and mother, but that didn't seem to matter to Hubie. I guess to him he was just the girl who did the cleaning and cooking—the girl he found in his favorite chair every night, half looking at the inevitable crossword puzzle-anagram book in her lap, and half listening to the TV set screeching in the background.

Madge was a real word games fan. Maybe they helped satisfy her desire for talk above a nine-year-old level. Maybe she thought if she improved her mind, Hubie would notice her more. Or maybe she just did them, because she didn't have anything better to do to pass the time while Hubie was out cheating on her.

I guess that was really what started it all—not his drinking, or the ponies, or his driving ambition to paint that billboard—his cheating. You see, despite all his other shortcomings, she did love him.

So when Hubert called to say he had a business meeting that night she knew what kind of "business" he meant. But she calmly fixed supper for the kids, and a drink for herself, and sat down in front of the TV with her puzzle book.

Reruns. In March. Good Lord, every year they started earlier. Maybe one year there wouldn't be any new shows at all—just reruns. Well, for that she'd just turn the damn thing off. . .

WELL, I'M NOT SURE what happened then—I guess nobody really knows. But from what I've heard, the next thing she knew, she was talking to a tall, dark, and kind of strange looking man in a black, semi-iridescent business suit.

Seems this man, Stan La Biela, had quite a few connections. He could make or break just about anyone, from what he said. And he was offering her a real simple way to break Hubert of his cheating—by getting rid of the other party.

Now I don't want to give you the wrong idea, Mac: Madge wasn't the type for murder. But somebody was stealing her man, and that called for drastic measures.

The only thing she couldn't quite figure out was his price. All he would say was that soon Madge and Hubie would be together again, forever—and that he never charged anyone beyond their capacity to pay. If the thought of being actually responsible for Toni's murder occurred to her at the time, she ignored it. After all, you know women—they can't pass up bargains, and this sure seemed like a bargain to end all. What else could she say but yes?

THAT NIGHT, HUBERT came home even later than usual, and the stench from Toni's perfume was suffocating. But Madge didn't really mind—how much longer would she have to put up with it? She fell asleep.

But as time passed, and Hubert kept on seeing a girl that was supposed to be dead, Madge started to get annoyed, then angry, then just plain furious. And when she started thinking that maybe it would be nice if Hubert was out of the way too, Stan La Biela put in another appearance.

He seemed to materialize right out of thin TV screen, just like before. And he had the deal she wanted—to get rid of both Hubert and Toni. I suppose she had a few bad minutes thinking about what she would do without Hubie, but when Stan took her to Alberto's for filet mignon and champagne, and promised her this wouldn't be the last time, she agreed to his deal. The price was the same—nothing she couldn't pay. And he assured her she would be above any suspicion.

She tried to find out just how he was going to pull the thing off, but all he would say was something about Hubie's moment of triumph being his moment of disaster. The champagne bubbles got in her way, though, and it didn't quite penetrate.

Hubert came home the next night with a glow on that wasn't booze for a change. He'd landed the contract to paint that billboard. He even took her to the track with him to celebrate, and bought her a beer afterwards.

The next day, he headed straight for Times Square to check with the agent, a Mr. La Biela, on colors and dimensions. After they finished talking, he walked outside. There it was. Well, he must have stood for about an hour, just watching that guy blow smoke rings. I guess that was when it started to bother him—just how did they get that sign to make such perfect, round rings? And how did they make them last so long with all the updrafts and stuff? Well, he'd know for sure tomor-

row when he started the job. But it was time to share his triumph with Toni.

He walked into Harry's with a big grin, and sat down to wait for her to get out of work. But when five o'clock rolled around, and she still hadn't shown up, he started to worry. Then he started to drink. By the time the early editions hit the newsstands, he could hardly read the headlines about the girl who had fallen in front of the 8th Avenue subway . . .

Madge was reading the headlines too. But she wasn't happy—she was scared. She knew she was to blame for Toni's death. And she finally understood just what Stan had meant when he said that Hubert's moment of triumph would be his moment of disaster. She wanted to call off the deal.

She didn't quite know how to get in touch with Stan, though. She tried contacting a few of the local gangsters, but they'd never heard of him. And she couldn't exactly tear the TV apart. The phone book? No, friend, I don't think so. He's got a number so unlisted, the phone company doesn't even know he has a phone.

By the time Hubert came home, she was ready to go nuts. She tried to talk to him, but he passed out cold. When she went to bed, that name was running through her mind like Arcaro was riding it—Stan La Biela—Stan La Biela—Stan La Biela—until she finally fell asleep. Then the dreams started—the kind of dreams you have when you've had one too many, and then a few more. And all through the dreams, there was this crazy laugh—you know, like at the Fun House at Coney Island? It got so loud it woke her up. That's when it hit her: Stan La Biela was an anagram for SATAN and BELIAL—she was dealing with the top, all right. And she had to stop Hubert!

But he was gone—it was almost ten o'clock in the morning. She found the note on the table: "I fed the kids—you looked so tired I didn't want to wake you. I love you, Midget."

"Midget"—he hadn't called her that since high school . . .

HUBERT SET UP HIS scaffold like he was painting the queen's portrait. This was one job he didn't want to mess up. He mixed his colors real carefully, and cleaned his brushes for about the fortieth time. Then his curiosity got the best of him. He just had to see how that guy made those smoke rings.

He lowered himself down to the mouth and looked in. Man, was it black in there! And the smoke was half choking him. But he had to

see—he just had to. Then he noticed the ladder. It started inside the mouth just under the guy's lip. He figured it must be for the guy who fixed the machinery. So he started down. About ten minutes later, he still couldn't see anything, which was strange, because he should have been at least at street level. But he kept on—he *had* to know how it worked before he started to paint it.

Without warning, the rungs stopped. There was nothing below his left foot, even though he stretched as far as he could. Then he heard it—the cracking sound as the ladder broke. As he fell, he noticed the faint red glow very, very far below him. And as the glow came nearer, the stench of rotten eggs hit him full force. Just before he passed out, he heard the laughter . . .

MADGE? OH, SHE GOT her part of the deal—both the payment and the part about being together forever. And no one suspected her. Seems she put her foot through the TV screen the same day, and you *know* what a mess *that* was. They'll be together forever now, that's for sure.

What? Oh, yeah, sure, Mac. You're welcome. Anytime. My name? Sergeant Bub DeVille, N. Y. P. D.—the "Bub" is short for "Bedzebub", you know. My Father always said I was a little devil! Hey! Where are you running to, Mac?



Ancient Fires

by Seabury Quinn

(author of *The Vengeance of India*, *The Isle of Missing Ships*, etc.)

"*TIENS*, FRIEND TROWBRIDGE, this is interesting." Jules de Grandin passed the classified page of the *Times* across the breakfast table, that morning in 1926, and indicated one of the small advertisements with the polished nail of his well-groomed forefinger. "Regard this *avis*, if you please, and say if I am not the man."

Fixing my reading glasses firmly on my nose, I perused the notice he pointed out:

Jules de Grandin had had experience with presences in houses—but what was the nature of this one, which seemed to favor the newest owner?

Looking over the chronological listing of the de Grandin stories, which we hope you will find elsewhere in this issue—if not, then patience is requested; it will be run later—we see that two of the first six appear in *The Phantom Fighter*, the collection of ten de Grandin tales published by Mycroft & Moran at \$5.00 the copy. The address of M&M is the same as that of Arkham House: Sauk City, Wisconsin, 53583). We have presented the other four. Here is the seventh, which we bring you in line with the desire of both that majority of you which wants to see us continue reprinting the de Grandin tales, and that insistent part of the majority which wants to see the oldest ones first.

WANTED—A man of more than ordinary courage to undertake confidential and possibly dangerous mission. Great physical strength not essential, but indomitable bravery and absolute fearlessness in the face of seemingly supernatural manifestations are. This is a remarkable work and will require the services of a remarkable man. A fee up to \$10,000 will be paid for the successful prosecution of the case. N. I. Selfridge, Attorney, Jennifer Building.

De Grandin's round blue eyes shone with elated anticipation as I put down the paper and regarded him across the cloth. "*Morbleu*, is it not an apple from the tree of Divine Providence?" he demanded, twisting the ends of his diminutive blond mustache ferociously. "A remarkable man for a remarkable work, do they say? *Cordieu*, but Jules de Grandin is that man, nor do I in any wise imply perhaps! You will drive me down to that so generous *soliciteur*, Friend Trowbridge, and we shall together collect from him this ten thousand dollars, or may I never hear the blackbirds whistle in the trees of St. Cloud again."

"Sounds like some bootlegger advertising for a first lieutenant," I discouraged, but he would not be gainsaid.

"We shall go, we shall most certainly go to see this remarkable lawyer who offers a remarkable fee to a remarkable man," he insisted, rising and dragging me from the table. "*Morbleu*, my friend, excitement is good, and gold is good, too; but gold and excitement together—*la, la*, they are a combination worthy of any man's love! Come, we shall go right away, at once, immediately."

We went. Half an hour later we were seated across a flat-topped mahogany desk, staring at a thin, undersized little man with an oversized bald head and small, sharp, birdlike black eyes.

"This seems incredibly good, gentlemen," the little lawyer assured us when he had finished examining the credentials de Grandin showed. "I had hoped to get some ex-service man—some youngster who hadn't gotten his fill of adventure in the great war, perhaps—or possibly some student of psychic phenomena—but—my dear sir!"—he beamed on my friend—"to secure a man of your standing is more than I dared hope. Indeed, I did not suspect such characters existed outside book covers."

"*Parbleu, Monsieur l'Avoue*," de Grandin replied with one of his impish smiles, "I have been in what you Americans call some tight places, but never have I been shut up in a book. Now, if you will be so good as to tell us something of this so remarkable mission you wish undertaken—" He paused, voice and eyebrows raised interrogatively.

"To be sure"—the attorney passed a box of cigars across the desk—"you'll probably consider this a silly sort of case for a man of your talents, but—well, to get down to brass tacks, I've a client who wants to sell a house."

"Ah?" de Grandin murmured noncommittally. "And we are to become indomitably fearless real estate brokers, perhaps?"

"Not quite," the lawyer laughed, "nothing quite as simple as that. You see, Redgables is one of the finest properties in the entire lake region. It lies in the very heart of the mountains, with a commanding view, contains nearly three thousand acres of good land, and, in fact, possesses nearly every requisite of an ideal country estate or a summer hotel or sanitarium. Normally, it's worth between three and four hundred thousand dollars; but, unfortunately, it possesses one drawback—a drawback which makes its market value practically nil. It's haunted."

"Eh, do you say so?" De Grandin sat up very straight in his chair and fixed his unwinking stare on the attorney. "*Parbleu*, it will be a redoubtable ghost whom Jules de Grandin can not eject for a fee of two hundred thousand francs! Say on, my friend; I burn with curiosity."

"The house was built some seventy-five years ago when that part of New York State was little better than a wilderness," the attorney resumed. "John Aglinberry, son of Sir Rufus Aglinberry, and the great-uncle of my client, was the builder. He came to this country under something of a cloud—pretty well estranged from his family—and built

that English manor house in the midst of our hills as a refuge from all mankind, it seems.

"As a young man he'd served with the British army in India, and got mixed up in rather a nasty scandal. Went *ghazi*—fell in love with a native girl and threatened to marry her. There was a devil of a row. His folks used influence to have him dismissed from the service and cut off his allowance to force him back to England. After that they must have made life pretty uncomfortable for him, for when he inherited a pile of money from a spinster aunt, he packed up and came to America, building that beautiful house out there in the woods and living like a hermit the rest of his life.

"The girl's family didn't take matters much easier than Aglinberry's, it seems. Something mysterious happened to her before he left India—I imagine he'd have stayed there in spite of hell and high water, if she'd lived.

"Somehow, the Aglinberry fortune petered out. John Aglinberry's younger brothers both came to this country and settled in New York, working at one thing and another till he died. They inherited the property share and share alike under our law; but it never did them any good. Neither of them was ever able to live in it, and they never could sell it. Something—mind you, I'm not saying it was a ghost—but something damned unpleasant, nevertheless, has run off every tenant who's ever attempted to occupy that place.

"My client is young John Aglinberry, great-nephew of the builder, and last of the family. He hasn't a cent to bless himself with, except the potential value of Redgables.

"That's the situation, gentlemen; a young man, heir to a baronetcy, if he wished to go to England to claim it, poorer than a church mouse, with a half-million dollar property eating itself up in taxes and no way to convert it into a dime in cash till he can find someone to demonstrate that the place isn't devil-ridden. Do you understand why we're willing to pay a ten thousand dollar fee—contingent on the success of re-establishing Redgables' good name?"

"*Tiens, Monsieur,*" de Grandin exclaimed, grinding the fire from his half-smoked cigar, "we do waste the time. I am all impatience to try conclusions with this property-destroying ghost who keeps your so deserving client out of the negotiation of his land and me from a ten thousand dollar fee. *Morbleu,* this is a case after my own heart! When shall we start for this so charming estate which is to pay me ten thousand dollars for ridding it of its specter tenants?"

JOHN AGLINBERRY, CHIEFLY distinguished by a wide, friendly grin, met us at the railroad station which lay some five miles from Redgables, and extended a warm handclasp in greeting. "It's mighty good of you gentlemen to come up here and give me a lift," he exclaimed as he shepherded us along the platform and helped stow our traps into the unkempt tonneau of a Ford which might have seen better days, though not recently. "Mr. Selfridge 'phoned me yesterday morning, and I hustled up here to do what I could to make you comfortable. I doubt you'd have been able to get any of the village folks to drive you over to the place—they're as frightened of it as they would be of a mad dog."

"But, *Monsieur*," de Grandin expostulated, "do you mean to say you have been in that house by yourself this morning?"

"Uh-huh, and last night, too," our host replied. "Came up here on the afternoon train yesterday and tidied things up a bit."

"And you saw nothing, felt nothing, heard nothing?" de Grandin persisted.

"Of course not," the young man answered impatiently. "There isn't anything to see or feel or hear, either, if you except the usual noises that go with a country place in springtime. There's nothing wrong with the property, gentlemen. Just a lot of silly gossip which has made one of the finest potential summer resorts in the county a drug on the market. That's why Mr. Selfridge and I are so anxious to get the statement of gentlemen of your caliber behind us. One word from you will outweigh all the silly talk these yokels can blab in the next ten years."

De Grandin cast me a quick smile. "He acknowledges our importance, my friend," he whispered. "Truly, we shall have to walk fast to live up to such a reputation."

Further conversation was cut short by our arrival at the gates of our future home. The elder Aglinberry had spared no expense to reproduce a bit of England in the Adirondacks. Tall posts of stone flanked the high iron gate which pierced the ivy-mantled wall surrounding the park, and a wide graveled driveway, bordered on each side by a wall of cedars, led to the house, which was a two-story Tudor structure with shingles of natural red cedar from which the place derived its name. Inside, the house bore out the promise of its exterior. The hall was wide and stone-paved, wainscoted with panels of walnut and with a beamed ceiling of adze-hewn cedar logs and slabs. A field-stone fireplace, almost as large as the average suburban cottage's garage, pierced the north wall, and the curving stairs were built with wide

treads and balustraded with hand-carved walnut. A single oil painting, that of the elder John Aglinberry, relieved the darkness of the wall facing the stairway.

"But, *Monseur*, this is remarkable," de Grandin asserted as he gazed upon the portrait. "From the resemblance you bear your late kinsman you might easily be taken for his son—yes, *pardieu*, were you dressed in the archaic clothes of his period, you might be himself!"

"I've noticed the resemblance, too," young Aglinberry smiled. "Poor old Uncle John, gloomy-looking cove, wasn't he? Anyone would think all his friends were dead and he was making plans to visit the village undertaker himself."

The Frenchman shook his head reprovingly at the younger man's facetiousness. "Poor gentleman," he murmured, "he had cause to look sad. When you, too, have experienced the sacrifice of love, you may look saddened, my friend."

We spent the remainder of the afternoon surveying the house and surrounding grounds. Dinner was cooked on a portable camp outfit over blazing logs in the hall fireplace, and about 9 o'clock all three of us mounted the stairs to bed. "Remember," de Grandin warned, "if you hear or see the slightest intimation of anything which is not as it should be, you are to ring the bell beside your bed, my friend. Dr. Trowbridge and I shall sleep like the cat, with one eye open and claws alert."

"Not a chance," our host scoffed. "I slept here last night and never saw or heard anything more supernatural than a stray rat, and mighty few of those."

I MIGHT HAVE SLEPT half an hour or twice that long when a gentle nudge brought me wide awake and sitting bolt upright in bed. "Trowbridge, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin's voice came through the darkness from across the room, "rise and follow; I think I hear *Monseur Aglinberry's* alarm bell!"

I slipped a bathrobe over my pajamas and took the loaded automatic and flashlight from under my pillow. "All right," I whispered, "I'm ready."

We stole down the hall toward our host's room, and de Grandin paused beside the door. Clearly we made out the sound of an untroubled sleeper's heavy breathing. "Guess you've been hearing things, de Grand-

in," I chuckled in a low voice, but he held up one slender hand in warning.

"P-a-s-t, be still!" he commanded. "Do not you hear it, too, my friend? Hark!"

I listened with bated breath, but no sound save the occasional ghostly creak of a floor-board came to my ear, then—

Faint, so faint it might have been mistaken for the echo of an imagined sound, had it not been for its insistence, I heard the light, far-away-sounding tinkle-tinkle of bells. "Tink-a-tink, a-tink-a-tink; tink-a-tink, a-tink-a-tink" they sounded, scarcely louder than the swishing of silk, every third and fifth beat accentuated in an endless "circular" rhythm; but their music did not emanate from the room beyond the door. Rather, it seemed to me, the tiny, fairylike ringing came up the stairway from the hall below.

My companion seemed struck by the same thought, for he crept past me toward the stairhead, his soft-soled slippers making no more noise against the hardwood floor than the beating of a moth's wings against the night air.

Close behind him I slipped, my gun and flashlight held in instant readiness, but at sight of his eager, strained face as he paused at the top of the stair I forgot my weapons and stole forward to peep over his shoulder.

A shutter must have come unfastened at one of the small, high windows in the hall, for a patch of dim moonlight, scarcely more than three feet in diameter, lay upon the floor directly beneath the portrait of the elder Aglinberry, and against the circle of luminance a thin, almost impalpable wreath of smoke seemed drifting before a draft of air from the fireplace. I looked again. No, it was not smoke, it was something with a defined outline. It was—it was a wisp of muslin, air-light and almost colorless in its sheerness, but cloth, nevertheless. And now, as I gazed unbelievably, something else seemed slowly taking form in the moonlight. A pair of narrow, high-arched feet and tapering, slender ankles, unclothed except for a double loop of bell-studded chains, were mincing and gyrating on flexible toes, while, fainter than the feet, but still perceptible, the outline of a body as fair as any that ever swayed to the tempo of music showed against the black background of the darkened hall like a figure dimly suggested in an impressionistic painting. Round and round, in a dazing but incredibly graceful dance the vision whirled, the hem of the muslin skirt standing outward with the motion of the

pirouetting feet, the tiny, golden bells on the chain anklets sending out their faerie music.

"*Morbleu!*" de Grandin whispered softly to himself. "Do you see it, also, Friend Trowbridge?"

"I—" I began in a muted voice, but stopped abruptly, for a puff of passing breeze must have closed the shutter, cutting off the moonbeam as a theatrical spotlight is shut off by a stage electrician. The illusion vanished instantly. There was no elfin, dancing form before the painted likeness of old John Aglinberry, no sound of clinking anklets in the old house. We were just a pair of sleep-disheveled men in bathrobes and pajamas standing at a stairhead and staring foolishly into the darkness of a deserted hallway.

"I thought I saw—" I began again, but again I was interrupted, this time by the unmistakable clatter of the hand-bell in Aglinberry's room.

We raced down the corridor to him and flung open the door. "Monsieur Aglinberry!" de Grandin gasped, "did it—did anything come into your room? Dr. Trowbridge and I—"

The young man sat up in bed, grinning sheepishly at us in the double beam of our flashlights. "I must be getting a case of nerves," he confessed. "Never had the jumps like this before. Just a moment ago I fancied I felt something touch my lips—like the tip of a bat's wing, it was, soft as velvet, and so light I could scarcely feel it; but it woke me up, and I grabbed the bell and began ringing, like a fool. Funny, too"—he glanced toward the window—"it couldn't have been a bat, for I took particular pains to nail mosquito-netting over that window this morning. It's—why, it's *torn!*"

Sure enough, the length of strong netting which our host had thoughtfully tacked across the windows of both our room and his as a precaution against early spring insects, was rent from top to bottom as though by a knife. "H'm," he muttered, "it *might* have been a bat, at that."

"To be sure," de Grandin agreed, nodding so vigorously that he resembled a Chinese mandarin, "it might, as you say, *Monsieur*, have been a bat. But I think you would sleep more safely if you closed the window." Crossing the room he drew the casement to and shot the forged iron bolt into place. "*Bon soir*, my friend"—he bowed formally at the doorway—"a good night, and be sure you leave your window closed."

"Would you gentlemen like to look at the property down by the lake?" Aglinberry asked as we finished our breakfast of bacon and eggs, coffee and fried potatoes the following morning.

"Assuredly," de Grandin replied as he donned topcoat and cap, slipping his ever-ready automatic pistol into his pocket, "a soldier's first caution should be to familiarize himself with the terrain over which he is to fight."

We marched down a wide, curving drive bordered by pollarded willows, toward the smooth sheet of water flashing in the early morning sunlight.

"We have one of the finest stands of native hardwood to be found anywhere in this part of the country," Aglinberry began, waving his stick toward an imposing grove to our right. "Just the timber alone is worth—well, of all the copper-riveted nerve!" he broke off angrily, hastening his pace and waving his cane beligerently. "See there? Some fool camper has started a fire in those woods. Hi, there, you! Hi, there; what're you doing?"

Hurrying through the trees we came upon a little clearing where a decrepit, weather-blistered van was drawn up beside a small spring, two moth-eaten appearing horses tethered to a nearby tree and several incredibly dirty children wrestling and fighting on the short grass. A man in greasy corduroys lay full length on the ground, a black slouch hat pulled over his eyes, while another lounged in the doorway of the van. Two women in faded shawls and headkerchiefs and an amazing amount of pinchbeck jewelry were busily engaged, one in hewing down underbrush to replenish the camp fire, the other stirring some sort of savory mess in a large, smoke-blackened kettle which swung over the blazing sticks.

"What the devil do you mean by building a fire here?" Aglinberry demanded angrily as we came to a halt. "Don't you know you're likely to start a blaze in these woods? Go down to the lake if you want to camp; there's no danger of burning things up there."

The women looked at him in sullen silence, their fierce black eyes smoldering angrily under their straight black brows; but the man lying beside the fire was not minded to be hustled from his comfortable couch.

"Too mucha stone by da lake," he informed Aglinberry lazily, raising the hat from his face, but making no other move toward obeying the summons to quit. "Too mucha stone an' sand. I lika dissa grass to lay on. I stay here. Sec?"

"By George, we'll see about that!" replied our trate host. "You'll

stay here, will you? Like hell you will!" Stepping quickly to the fire, he shouldered the crouching woman out of his path and scattered the blazing sticks from under the kettle with a vigorous kick of his heavy boot, stamping the flame from the brands and kicking earth over the embers. "Stay here, will you?" he repeated. "We'll see about that. Pull your freight, and pull it in a hurry, or I'll have the whole gang of you arrested for trespass."

The reclining gipsy leaped to his feet as though propelled by a spring. "You telda me pulla da freight? You keek my fire out? You? Ha, I show you somet'ing!" His dirty hand flew to the girdle about his greasy trousers, and a knife's evil flash showed in the sunlight. "You t'ink you make da fool of Nikolai Brondovitch? I show you!"

Slowly, with a rolling tread which reminded me of a tiger preparing to leap, he advanced toward Aglinberry, his little, porcine eyes snapping vindictively, his bushy eyebrows bent into an almost straight line with the ferocity of his scowl.

"*Eh bien, Monsieur le Bohemien,*" Jules de Grandin remarked pleasantly, "were I in your shoes—and very dirty shoes they are, too—I would consider what I did before I did it." The gipsy turned a murderous scowl on him and stopped short in his tracks, his narrow eyes contracting to mere slits with apprehension. The Frenchman had slipped his pistol from his pocket and was pointing its uncompromising black muzzle straight at the center of the Romany's checked shirt.*

"Meester," the fellow pleaded, sheathing his knife hurriedly and forcing his swarthy features into the semblance of a smile, "I maka da joke. I not mean to hurt your frand. I poor man, trying to make honest living by selling horses. I not mean to scare your frand. We taka da camp offa hees lan' right away."

"*Pardieu*, my friend, I think you will," de Grandin agreed, nodding approvingly. "You will take your so filthy wagon, your horses, your women and your brats from off this property. You leave at once, immediately, right away!" He waved his blue steel pistol with an authoritative gesture. "Come; I have already waited too long; try not my patience, I beseech you."

Muttering imprecations in their unintelligible tongue and showering us with looks as malignant as articulate curses, the gipsies broke camp under our watchful supervision, and we followed them down the grass-grown drive toward the lake front. We watched them off the land, then proceeded with our inspection of the estate.

REDGABLES WAS AN extensive property and we spent the better part of the day exploring its farther corners. By nightfall all three of us were glad to smoke a sociable pipe and turn in shortly after dinner.

I was lying on my back, staring straight upward to the high ceiling of our chamber and wondering if the vision of the night before had been some trick of our imaginations, when deGrandin's sharp, strident whisper cut through the darkness and brought me suddenly wide-awake. "Trow-bridge," he murmured, "I hear a sound. Someone is attempting entrance!"

I lay breathless a moment, straining my ears for any corroboration of his statement, but only the sougling of the wind through the evergreens outside and the occasional rasp of a bough against the house rewarded my vigil. "Rats!" I scoffed. "Who'd try to break into a house with such a reputation as this one's? Why, Mr. Selfridge told us even the tramps avoided the place as if it were a plague-spot."

"Nevertheless," he insisted as he drew on his boots and pulled a top-coat over his pajamas, "I believe we have uninvited guests, and I shall endeavor to mend their manners, if such they be."

There was nothing to do but follow him. Downstairs, tiptoe, our flashlights held ready and our pistols prepared for emergency, we stole through the great, dark hall, undid the chain-fastener of the heavy front door, and walked softly around the angle of the house.

At deGrandin's direction, we kept to the shadow of the tall, black-branched pine trees which grew near the house, watching the moonlit walls of the building for any evidence of a housebreaker.

"It is there the young Aglinberry sleeps," deGrandin observed in a low voice as he indicated a partly opened casement on the second floor, its small panes shining like nacre in the rays of the full moon. "I observe he has not obeyed our injunctions to close his sash in the night-time. *Morbleu*, that which we did see last night might have been harmless, my friend, but, again, it might have been—ah, my friend, look; look!"

Stealthily, silently as a shadow, a stooped form stole around the corner of the wall, paused huddled in a spot of darkness where the moonbeams failed to reach, then slowly straightened up, crept into the light, and began mounting the rough rubblestone side of the house, for all the world like some great, uncanny lizard from the preadamite days. Clinging to the protuberances of the rocks with clawlike hands, feeling for footholds in the interstices where cement had weathered away, the thing slowly ascended, nearer and yet nearer Aglinberry's unlatched window.

"*Dieu de Dieu*," deGrandin muttered, "if it be a phantom, our friend

Aglinberry is in misfortune, for 'twas he himself who left his window unfastened. If it be not a ghost—*parbleu*, it had better have said its paternosters, for when he puts his head in that window, I fire!" I saw the glint of moonlight on the blue steel of his pistol barrel as he trained it on the climbing thing.

Inch by inch the creature—man or devil—crept up the wall, reached its talon hands across the stone sill, began drawing itself through the casement. I held my breath, expecting the roar of de Grandin's pistol each second, but a sudden gasp of astonishment beside me drew my attention from the creeping thing to my companion.

"Look, Friend Trowbridge, *regardez, s'il vous plait!*" he bade me in a tremulous whisper, nodding speechlessly toward the window into which the marauder was disappearing like a great, black serpent into its lair. I turned my gaze toward the window again and blinked my eyes in unbelief.

An odd luminescence, as if the moon's rays had been focused by a lens, appeared behind the window opening. It was like a mirror of dull silver, or a light faintly reflected from a distance. Tiny bits of impalpable dust, like filings from a silversmith's rasp, seemed floating in the air, whirling, dancing lightly in the converging moon rays, circling about each other like dust-motes seen in a sun-shaft through a darkened room, driving together, *taking form*. Laterally out of moonlight, a visible, discernible something was being made. Spots of shadow appeared against the phosphorescent gleam, alternate highlights and shadows became apparent, limning the outlines of a human face, a slender, oval face with smoothly-parted hair sleekly drawn across a high, broad forehead; a face of proud-mouthed, narrow-nosed beauty such as the highest-caste women of the Rajputs have.

A moment it seemed suspended there, more like the penumbra of a shadow than an actual entity, then seemed to surge forward, to lose its sharpness of outline, and blend, mysteriously, with the darkness of the night-prowler's form, as though a splash of mercury were suddenly thrown upon a slab of carbon.

A moment the illusion of light-on-darkness held, then a scream of wire-edged terror, mingled with mortal pain, shuddered through the quiet night as, a lightning flash rips across a thunder cloud. The climber loosed both hands from the window sill, clawed frantically at the empty air above him, then hurtled like a plummet to the earth, almost at our feet.

Our flashlights shot their beams simultaneously on the fallen man's

face as we reached his side, revealing the features of Nikolai Brondovitch, the gipsy Aglinberry had ordered off the place that morning.

But it was a different face from that the Romany had displayed when threatening Aglinberry or attempting to conciliate de Grandin. The eyes were starting from their sockets, the mouth hung open with an imbecile, hang-jawed flaccidity. And on the gipsy's lean, corded throat was a knotted swelling, as though a powerful clamp had seized and crushed the flesh together, shutting off breath and blood in a single mighty grasp. Both de Grandin and I recognized the thing before us for what it was—trust a physician to recognize it! Death is unique, and nothing in the world counterfeits it. The scoundrel had died before his body touched the ground.

"*Nom d'un nom!*" de Grandin murmured wonderingly. "And did you also see it, Friend Trowbridge?"

"I saw something," I answered, shuddering at the recollection.

"And what did you see?" his words came quickly, like an eager lawyer cross-examining a reluctant witness.

"It—it looked like a woman's face," I faltered, "but—"

"*Nom de Dieu*, yes," he agreed, almost hysterically, "a woman's face—a face with no body beneath it! *Parbleu*, my friend, I think this adventure is worthy of our steel. Come, let us see the young Aglinberry."

We hurried into the house and up the stairs, hammering on our host's door, calling his name in frenzied shouts.

"Eb, what's up?" his cheery voice responded, and next moment he unfastened the door and looked at us, a sleepy grin mantling his youthful face. "What's the idea of you chaps breaking a fellow's door down at this time o' night?" he wanted to know. "Having bad dreams?"

"*Mon—Monseur!*" de Grandin stammered, his customary aplomb deserting him. "Do you mean—have you been *sleeping*?"

"Sleeping?" the other echoed. "What do you think I went to bed for? What's the matter, have you caught the family ghost?" He grinned at us again.

"And you have heard nothing, seen nothing—you do not know an entrance to your room was almost forced?" de Grandin asked incredulously.

"An entrance to my room?" the other frowned in annoyance, looking quizzically from one of us to the other. "Say, you gentlemen had better go back to bed. I don't know whether I'm lacking in a sense of humor or what my trouble is, but I don't quite get the joke of waking a man

up in the middle of the night to tell him that sort of cock-and-bull story."

"*Nous d'un chou-fleur?*" De Grandin looked at me and shook his head wonderingly. "He has slept through it all, Friend Trowbridge!"

Aglinberry bristled with anger. "What're you fellows trying to do, string me?" he demanded hotly.

"Your hat, your coat, your boots, *Monsieur!*" de Grandin exclaimed in reply. "Come outside with us, come and see the vile wretch who would have slaughtered you like a pig in the shambles. Come and behold, and we shall tell you how he died."

BY MUTUAL CONSENT we decided to withhold certain details of the gipsy's death from the coroner's jury next day, and a verdict to the effect that the miscreant had come to his death while attempting to "break and enter the dwelling house of one John Aglinberry in the nighttime, forcibly, feloniously and against the form of the statute in such case made and provided" was duly returned.

The gipsy was buried in the Potter's Field and we returned to our vigil in the haunted house.

AGLINBERRY WAS ALMOST OFFENSIVELY incredulous concerning the manner of the gipsy's death. "Nonsense!" he exclaimed when we insisted we had seen a mysterious, faintly luminous face at the window before the would-be housebreaker hurried to his death. "You fellows are so fed up on ghost-lore that you've let this place's reputation make you see things—things which weren't there."

"*Monsieur,*" de Grandin assured him with injured dignity, "it is that you speak out of the conceit of boundless ignorance. When you have seen one-half—*pardieu*, one-quarter or one-eighth—the things I have seen, you will learn not to sneer at whatever you fail to understand. As that so magnificent Monsieur Shakespeare did say, 'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'"

"Probably," our host interrupted, smothering a yawn, "but I'm content to let 'em stay there. Meantime, I'm going to bed. Good night." And up the stairs he marched, leaving us to share the warmth of the crackling pitch-pine fire.

De Grandin shook his head pityingly after the retreating youngster. "He is the perfect type of that Monsieur Babbu," he confided. "Worldly, materialistic, entirely devoid of imagination. *Parbleu*, we have them in France, too! Did they not make mock of Pasteur, *le grand*, when he announced his discoveries to a skeptical world? Most assuredly. Like

the poor, the materialist we have always with us.—Ha! what is that? Do you hear it, Trowbridge, my friend?"

Faintly, so faintly it was like the half-heard echo of an echo, the fine, musical jangle of tiny bells wafted to us through the still, cold air of the dark old house.

"In there, 'twas in the library it sounded!" the Frenchman insisted in an excited whisper as he leaped to his feet and strode across the hall. "Your light, Friend Trowbridge, quick, your light!"

I threw the beam of my electric torch about the high-walled, somber old reading room, but nothing more ghostly than the tall walnut bookcases, empty of books and laden only with dust these many years, met our eyes. Still the soft, alluring chime sounded somewhere in the shadows, vague and indefinite as the cobwebbed darkness about us, but insistent as a trumpet call heard across uncounted miles of night.

"*Morbleu*, but this is strange!" de Grandin asserted, circling the room with quick, nervous steps. "Trowbridge, Trowbridge, my friend, as we live, those bells are calling us, calling—ah, *cordieu*, they are here!"

He had halted before a carved panel under one of the old bookcases and was on his hands and knees, examining each figure of the conventionalized flowers and fruits which adorned its surface. With quick, questing fingers he felt the carvings, like a cracksman feeling out the combination of a safe. "*Nom d'un fromage*, I have it!" he called in lilting triumph as he bore suddenly down upon a bunch of carved grapes and the panel swung suddenly inward upon invisible hinges. "Trowbridge, *mon ami*, *regardez vous!*"

Peering into the shadow opening left by the heavy, carved plank, we beheld a package carefully wrapped in linen, dust-covered and yellowed with age.

"Candles, if you please, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin commanded as he bore our find in triumph to the hall. "We shall see what secret of the years these bells have led us to." He sank into his armchair and began unwinding the linen bands.

"Ah? And what is this?" He unreeled the last of the bandages and displayed a small roll of red morocco leather, a compact little case such as an elder generation of men carried with them for supplying needles, buttons, thread and other aids to the womanless traveler. Inside the wallet was a length of tough, age-tanned parchment, and attached to it by a loop of silk was a single tiny hawkbell of gold, scarcely larger than a head, but capable of giving off a clear, penetrating tinkle as the parchment shook in de Grandin's impatient hands.

I looked over his shoulder in fascinated interest, but drew back with disappointment as I saw the vellum was covered with closely-written scrawls somewhat resembling shorthand.

"U'm?" de Grandin regarded the writing a moment, then tapped his even, white teeth with a meditative forefinger. "This will require much study, Friend Trowbridge," he murmured. "Many languages have I studied, and my brain is like a room where many people speak together—out of the babel I can distinguish but few words unless I bear my attention on some one talk. This"—he tapped the crinkling parchment—parchment—"is Hindustani, if I mistake not; but to translate it will require more time than these candles will burn. Nevertheless, we shall try."

He hurried to our bedroom, returning in a moment with a pad of paper and a fresh supply of candles. "I shall work here for a time," he announced, reseating himself before the fire. "It will be long before I am prepared for bed, and it may be well for you to seek repose. I shall make but poor company these next few hours."

I accepted the dismissal with an answering grin and, taking my candle, mounted the stairs to bed.

"EH BIEN, MY FRIEND, YOU DO SLEEP like the dead—the righteous dead who have no fear of purgatory!" de Grandin's voice roused me the following morning.

The bright spring sunshine was beating into our chamber through the open casement, and a puff of keen breeze fluttered the trailing bed-clothes, but my friend's face rivaled the brilliance of the breaking day. "*Trompe!*" he exclaimed, brandishing a sheaf of papers above his blonde head. "It is finished, it is complete, it is done altogether entirely. Attend me, my friend, listen with care, for you are not like to hear such a tale soon again:

Lord of my life and master of my heart: This day is the fulfilment of the fate overhanging the wretched woman who has unworthily been honored by your regard, for this night I was bidden by my father to chose whether I would be married by the priests to the god Khandoka and become a temple bayadere—and my lord well knows what the life of such an one is—or go the shrine of Omkar, God of Destruction, to become *kurban*. I have chosen to make the leap, my lord, for there is no other way for Amari.

We have sinned, thou against thy people and I against mine,

in that we did dare defy varna and love, when such a love is forbidden between the races. Varna forbids it, the commands of thy people and mine forbid it, and yet we loved. Now our brief dream of *kailas* is broken as the mists of morning break and fly before the scarlet lances of the sun, and thou returnest to thy people; Amari goes to her fate.

By the leap I assure my sinful spirit of a resting place in *kailas*, for the *kurban* all sins are forgiven, even unto that of taking the life of a Brahmin or giving herself in love to one of another race; but she who retreats from the leap commits a sin with each step so great that a thousand reincarnations can not atone for it.

In this life the walls of varna stand between us, but, perchance, there may come a life when Amari inhabits the body of a woman of the sahib's race, or my lord and master may be clothed in the flesh of one of Amari's people. These things it is not given Amari to know, but this she knows full well: Throughout the seven cycles of time which shall endure through all the worlds and the gods themselves shall have shuddered into dust, Amari's heart is ever and always inclined to the sahib, and the walls of death or the force of life shall not keep her from him. Farewell, master of Amari's breath, perchance we shall meet again upon some other star, and our waking spirits may remember the dream of this unhappy life. But ever, and always, Amari loves thee, sahib John.

"Yes?" I asked as he finished reading. "And then?"

"*Parbleu*, my friend, there was no then!" he answered. "Listen, you do not know India. I do. In that so depraved country they do consider that the woman who goes to the bloody shrine of the god Omkar and hurls herself down from a cliff upon his bloody altar attains to sainthood. It was that which this poor one meant when she did speak of 'the leap' in her farewell note to her white lover. *Kurban* is the word in their so detestable language for human sacrifice, and when she speaks of attaining *kailas* she refers to their heathenish word for heaven. When she says varna stood between them she did mean caste. *Cordieu*—you English, you Americans! Always you drive yourselves crazy with thoughts of what should and what should not be done. *Nom d'un coq!* Why did not this Monsieur Agliaberry the elder take this Hindoo woman to wife, if he loved her, and thumb his nose at her brown-skinned relatives and his fair-eyed English kin as well? 'Tis what a Frenchman would have done in like case. But no, he must needs allow the woman he loved to hurl

herself over a cliff for the edification of a crowd of monkey-faced heathen who are undoubtedly stewing in hell at this moment, while he ran overseas to America and built him a mansion in the wilderness. A mansion, *pardieu*! A mansion without the light of love in its rooms or the footfalls of little children on its floors. *Nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu*, a mansion of melancholy memories, it is! *À bas* such a people! They deserve *la prohibition*, nothing better!" He walked back and forth across the room in a fury of disgust, snapping his fingers and scowling ferociously.

"All right," I agreed, laughing in spite of myself, "we'll grant all you say; but where does that get us as regards Redgables? If the ghost of this Hindoo girl haunts this house, how are we going to lay it?"

"How should I know?" he returned peevishly. "If the ancient fires of this dead woman's love burn on the cold hearth of this *sacré* house, who am I to put them out? Oh, it is too pitiful, too pitiful; that such a love as theirs should have been sacrificed on the altar of *varna*—caste!"

"Hullo, bullo, up there!" came a cheery hail from the hall below. "You chaps up yet? Breakfast is ready, and we've got callers. Come down."

"Breakfast!" de Grandin snorted disgustedly. "He talks of breakfast in a house, where the ghost of murdered love dwells! But"—he turned an impish grin on me—"I hope he has compounded some of those so delicious flap-the-jacks for us, even so."

"DR. DE GRANDIN, THIS IS Dr. Wiltse," Aglinberry introduced as we descended to the hall. "Dr. Trowbridge, Dr. Wiltse. Wiltse is superintendent of a sanitarium for the feeble-minded over there"—he waved his arm in a vague gesture—"and when he heard Dr. de Grandin was in the neighborhood, he came over for a consultation. It seems—oh, you tell him your troubles, Wiltse."

Dr. Wiltse was a pleasant-looking young man with a slightly bald head and large-lensed, horn-rimmed spectacles. He smiled agreeably as he hastened to comply with Aglinberry's suggestion. "Fact is, doctor," he began as de Grandin piled his plate high with "flap-the-jacks," "we've got a dam' peculiar case over at Thornwood. It's a young girl who's been in our charge for the past twelve years—ever since she was ten years old. The poor child suffered a terrible fright when she was about six, according to the history we have of her case—horses of the carriage in which she and her mother were riding ran away, threw 'em both out, killed the mother and—well, when they picked the youngster up she was

just one of God's little ones. No more reason than a two-months-old baby.

"Her family's rich enough, but she has no near relatives, so she's been in our care at Thornwood, as I said; for the past twelve years. She's always been good as gold, scarcely any trouble at all, sitting on the bed or the floor and playing with her fingers or toes, like an infant, most of the time; but lately she's been acting up like the devil. Fact. Tried to brain the nurse with a cup three nights ago, and made a break at one of the matrons yesterday morning. From a simple, sweet-tempered little idiot she's turned into a regular hell-cat. Now, if she'd been suffering from ordinary dementia, I'd—"

"Very good, very good, my friend," de Grandin replied as he handed his plate to Aglinberry for further replenishment. "I shall be delighted to look at your patient this morning. *Parbleu*, a madhouse will be a pleasant contrast to this never enough to be execrated place!"

"He likes my house," Aglinberry commented to Dr. Wiltzie with a sardonic grin as we rose and prepared to go the sanitarium.

THORNWOOD SANITARIUM WAS A beautiful, remodeled private country home, and differed in no wise from the nearby estates except that the park about the house was enclosed in a high stone wall topped with a *chevaux-de-frise* of barbed wire.

"How's Mary Ann, Miss Underwood?" Wiltzie asked as we entered the spacious central hall and paused at the door of the executive office.

"Worse, doctor," replied the competent-looking young woman in nurse's uniform at the desk. "I've sent Mauntingly up to her twice this morning, but the dosage has to be increased each time, and the medicine doesn't seem to hold as well."

"H'm," Wiltzie muttered noncommittally, then turned to us with an anxious look. "Will you come to see the patient, gentlemen? You, too, Aglinberry, if you wish. I imagine this'll be a new experience for you."

Upstairs, we peered through the small aperture in the door barring the demented girl's room. If we had not been warned of her condition, I might easily have taken the young woman asleep on the neat, white cot for a person in perfect health. There was neither the emaciation nor the obesity commonly seen in cases of dementia, no drawing of the face, not even a flaccidity of the mouth as the girl lay asleep.

Her abundant dark hair had been clipped short as a discouragement to the vermin which seem naturally to gravitate to the insane in spite of their keeper's greatest care, and she was clothed in a simple muslin

nighdress, cut modestly at the neck and without sleeves. One cheek pale from confinement, but otherwise flawless, lay pillowed on her bent arm, and it seemed to me the poor girl smiled in her sleep with the wistfulness of a tired and not entirely happy child. Long, curling lashes fringed the ivory lids which veiled her eyes, and the curving brows above them were as delicately penciled and sharply defined as though drawn on her white skin with a camel's hair brush.

"*La pauvre enfant!*" de Grandin murmured compassionately, and at the sound of his voice the girl awoke.

Gone instantly was the reposeful beauty from her face. Her lips stretched into a square like the mouth of one of those old Greek tragic masks, her large, brown eyes glared fiercely, and from her gaping red mouth issued such a torrent of abuse as might have brought a blush to the face of the foulest fishwife in Billingsgate.

Wiltzie's face showed a dull flush as he turned to us. "I'm dashed if I can understand it," he admitted. "She goes on this way for hours on end, now."

"Eh, is it so?" de Grandin responded. "And what, may I ask, have you been doing for this condition? It appears more like delirium than like dementia, my friend."

"Well, we've been administering small doses of brandy and strychnin, but they don't seem to have the desired effect, and the doses have to be increased constantly."

"Ah?"—de Grandin's smile was slightly satirical—"and has it never occurred to you to employ hypnotics? Hyoscin, by example?"

"By George, it didn't!" Wiltzie confessed. "Of course, hyoscin would act as a cerebral sedative, but we'd never thought of using it."

"Very well, I suggest you employ a hypodermic injection of hyoscin hypobromid," de Grandin dismissed the case with an indifferent shrug of his shoulders, but Aglinberry, moved by that curiosity which is akin to fascination felt by the normal person regarding the insane, looked past him at the raving girl inside the cell.

An instant change came over her. From a cursing, blaspheming maniac, the girl became a quiet, sorrowful-looking child, and on her suddenly calmed face was such a look of longing as I have seen children undergoing strict diet give some particularly toothsome and forbidden dainty.

Young Aglinberry suppressed a shudder with difficulty. "Poor child," he muttered, "poor, poor little girl, to be so lovely and so hopeless!"

"*Oui, Monsieur,*" de Grandin agreed moodily as we went down the stairs, "you do well to pity her, for the intelligence—the very soul of her—has been dead these many years; only her body remains alive, and—*pitie de Dieu*—what a life it is! Ah, if only some means could be found to graft the healthy intelligence animating a sick body into that so healthy body of hers, what an economy!" He lapsed into moody silence, which remained unbroken during our drive back to Redgables.

THE SUN HAD GONE DOWN in a blaze of red against the western sky, and the pale new moon was swimming easily through a tumbling surf of a bank of foaming cirrus clouds when the deep-throated, belling bay of a hound came echoing to us, from the grounds outside the old house. "*Grand Dieu!*" de Grandin leaped nervously from his chair. "What is that? Do they hunt in this country while the mating season is but blossoming into flower among the wild things?"

"No, they don't," Aglinberry answered testily. "Someone has let his dogs out on my land. 'Come on; let's chase 'em off. I won't have 'em poaching on the game here like that.'"

We trailed out of the hall and walked quickly toward the sound of the baying, which rose fuller and fuller from the region of the lake. As we neared the dogs, the sound of human voices became audible. "That you, Mr. Aglinberry?" a man called, and the flash of an electric torch showed briefly among the new-leaved thickets by the waterfront.

"Yes," our host answered shortly. "Who the devil are you, and what are you doing here?"

"We're from Thornwood, sir," the man answered, and we saw the gleam of his white hospital uniform under his dark topcoat. "The crazy girl, Mary Ann, got away about an hour ago, and we're trailing her with the hounds. She went completely off her head after you left this morning, and fought so they couldn't give her the hypo without strapping her. After the injection she quieted down, but when the matron went to her room with dinner she suddenly woke up, threw the woman against the wall so hard she almost cracked her ribs, and got clean away. She can't have gotten far, though, running over this broken country in her bare feet."

"Oh, hell!" Aglinberry stormed, striking a bush beside the path a vicious slash with his stick. "It's bad enough to have my place overrun with gipsies and gossiped about by all the country yaps in the country, but when lunatics get to making a hangout of it, it's too much!"

"Hope you find her," he flung back over his shoulder as he turned toward the house. "And for the Lord's sake, if you do get her, keep her at Thornwood. I don't want her chasing all over *this place!*"

"*Monsieur*—" de Grandin began, but Aglinberry cut him short.

"Yes, I know what you'll say," he broke in, "you want to tell me a ghost-woman will protect me from the lunatics, just as she did from the gipsy, don't you?"

"No, my friend," de Grandin began with surprizing mildness, "I do not think you need protection from the poor mad one, but—" He broke off with his sentence half spoken as he stared intently at an object hurrying toward us across a small clearing.

"Good God!" Aglinberry exclaimed. "It's she! The crazy girl!"

Seemingly gone mad himself, he rushed toward the white-robb'd figure in the clearing, brandishing his heavy stick. "I'll handle her," he called back, "I don't care how violent she is; I'll handle her!"

In another moment he was halfway across the cleared space, his thick walking stick poised for a blow which would render the maniac unconscious.

Any medical student with the most elementary knowledge of insanity could have told him a lunatic is not to be cowed by violence. As though the oaken cudgel had been a wisp of straw, the maniac rushed toward him, then stopped a scant dozen feet away and held out her tapering arms.

"John," she called softly, a puzzling, exotic thickness in her pronunciation. "John, *sakib*, it is I!"

Aglinberry's face was like that of a man suddenly roused from sound slumber. Astonishment, incredulity, joy like that of a culprit reprieved as the hangman knots the noose about his neck, shone on his features. The threatening club fell with a soft thud to the turf, and he gathered the mad-woman's slender body to his breast, covering her upturned face with kisses.

"Amari, my Amari; Amari, my beloved!" he crooned in a soft, sobbing voice. "Oh, my love, my precious, precious love. I have found you; I have found you at last!"

The girl laughed lightly, and in her laughter there was no hint or taint of madness. "Not Amari, Mary Ann in this life, John," she told him, "but yours, John *sakib*, whether we stand beside the Ganges or the Hudson, beloved through all the ages."

'Ah, got her, sir?' The hospital attendants, a pair of bloodhounds

sugging at the leash before them, broke through the thicket at the clearing's farther side. "That's right, sir: hold her tight till we slip the strait-jacket on her."

Aglinberry thrust the girl behind him and faced the men. "You can't have her," he announced uncompromisingly. "She's mine."

"Wha—what?" the attendant stammered, then turned toward the underbrush and called to some invisible companion. "Hey, Bill, come 'ere; there's *two* of 'em!"

"You can't have her," Aglinberry repeated as two more attendants reinforced the first pair. "She's going to stay with me—always."

"Now, look here, sir," the leader of the party argued, "that girl's a dangerous lunatic; she nearly killed a matron this evenin', an' she's been regularly committed to Thornwood Sanitarium. We've tracked her here, an' we're goin' to take her back."

"Over the dead corpse of Jules de Grandin," the Frenchman interrupted as he pressed forward. "*Parbleu*, me, I am in authority here. I shall be responsible for her conduct."

The man hesitated a moment, then shrugged his shoulders. "It's your funeral if anything happens on account o' this," he warned. "Tomorrow Dr. Wiltzie will start legal proceedings to get her back. You can't win."

"Ha, can I not?" the little Frenchman's teeth gleamed in the moonlight. "My friend, you do not know Jules de Grandin. There is no lunacy commission in the world to which I can not prove her sanity. I do pronounce her cured, and the opinion of Jules de Grandin of the Sorbonne is not to be lightly sneeze upon, I do assure you!"

To Aglinberry he said: "Pick her up, my friend; pick her up and bear her to the house, lest the stones bruise her tender feet. Dr. Trowbridge and I will follow and protect you. *Parbleu*"—he glared defiantly about him—"me, I say nothing shall separate you again. Lead on!"

"FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, DE GRANDIN," I besought as we followed Aglinberry and the girl toward the house, "what does this all mean?"

"*Morbleu*," he nodded solemnly at me, "it means we have won ten thousand dollars, Friend Trowbridge. No more will the ghost of that so pitiful Hindoo woman haunt this house. We have earned our fee."

"Yes, but—" I pointed mutely toward our host as he strode through the moonlight with the girl in his arms.

"Ah—that?" he laughed a silent, contented laugh. "That, my friend,

is a demonstration that the ancient fires of love die not, no matter how much we heap them with the ashes of hate and death.

"The soul of Amari, the sacrificed Hindoo girl, has come to rest in the body of the lunatic, Mary Ann, just as the soul of John Aglinberry the elder was reborn into the body of his namesake and double, John Aglinberry the younger. Did not the deceased Indian girl promise that she would some day come back to her forbidden lover in another shape? *Parbleu*, but she has fulfilled her vow! Always have the other members of Aglinberry's family been unable to live in this house, because they were of the clan who helped separate the elder lovers.

"Now, this young man, knowing nothing of his uncle's intimate affairs, but bearing in his veins the blood of the elder Aglinberry, and on his face the likeness of the uncle, too, must have borne within his breast the soul of the disappointed man who ate out his heart in sorrow and loneliness in this house which he had builded in the American woods. And the spirit of Amari, the Hindoo, who has kept safe the house from alien blood and from the members of her soulmate's family who would have robbed him of his inheritance, did find near at hand the healthy body of a lunatic whose soul—or intelligence, if you please—had long since sped, and entered therein to dwell on earth again. Did you not see sanity and longing looking out of her eyes when she beheld him in the madhouse this morning, my friend? Sanity? But yes, it was recognition, I tell you!

"Her violence? 'Twas but the clean spirit of the woman fighting for mastery of a body long untenanted by an intelligence. Were you to attempt to play a long-disused musical instrument, Trowbridge, my friend, you could make but poor work of it at first, but eventually you would be able to produce harmony. So it was in this case. The spirit sought to use a long-disused brain, and at first the music she could make was nothing but noise. Now, however, she has secured mastery of her instrument, and henceforth as that of a healthy, sane woman. I, Jules de Grandin, will demonstrate her sanity to the world, and you, my friend, shall help me. Together we shall win, together we shall make certain that these lovers, thwarted in one life, shall complete this cycle in happiness.

"*Et bien*," he twisted the ends of his blond mustache and set his hat at a rakish angle on the side of his head, "it is possible that somewhere in space there waits for me the spirit of a woman whom I have loved and lost. I wonder, when she comes, if I, like the lucky young Aglinberry yonder, shall 'wake, and remember, and understand'?"

The Cases Of Jules de Grandin

A Chronological Listing

The de Grandin-Trowbridge series do not present dating problems the way the Sherlock Holmes stories do; there is no reason to assume, or even suspect, that the adventures took place much earlier than the actual time at which the stories were published, allowing for a lag of some months between the preparation of the manuscript and its appearance in print. Seabury Quinn states that he wrote the first story in the spring of 1925; it was published in the October 1925 issue of *WEIRD TALES*, which went on sale on or around the 1st of September in that year. Some of the later manuscripts may have taken a little longer to get into print; however, there are no grounds for assuming that any particular case actually occurred later than one which was published still later: that, to pick an example of out the air, *Ancient Fires* (September 1926) should really follow *The Poltergeist* (October 1927).

All the stories originally appeared in *WEIRD TALES*, and we shall not waste space in saying so; nor again in specifying that a reprint also appeared there. Credit outside will be to *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* (MOH), *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* (SMS) or the Mycroft & Moran collection, *The Phantom Fight-*

er (M&M) wherein we have ten of the adventures slightly revised and updated (\$5.00 from Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin 53583.) The illustrator for each story is noted in parenthesis, his name being given as fully as known only the first time; when you see two names, or the same name repeated, the first denotes a cover illustration.

To the best of my knowledge and belief, none of the stories appear in any anthology now in print. RAWL

Part One: 1925—1932

1. *The Horror on the Links*, October 1925, May 1937; (Andrew Brosnatch); M&M 1966 (title changed to *The Terror on the Links*.)
2. *The Tenants of Broussac*, December 1925; (Joseph Doolin, Doolin); SMS #4, Spring 1967.
3. *The Isle of Missing Ships*, February 1926; (unidentified; possibly Brosnatch); SMS #10, Fall 1966.
4. *The Vengeance of India*, April 1926; (Brosnatch); SMS #11, Winter 1968/69.
5. *The Dead Hand*, May 1926; (unidentified; possibly Brosnatch); M&M 1966.
6. *The House of Horror*, July 1926; (R. E. Banta); SMS #2, Fall 1966.
7. *Ancient Fires*, September 1926; (G. Olinick); SMS #13, Summer 1969.

8. *The Great God Pan*, October 1926; (Olinick).

9. *The Grinning Mummy*, November 1926; (Olinick).

10. *The Man Who Cast No Shadow*, February 1927; (C. Barker Petrie, Jr.; Petrie).

11. *The Blood-Flower*, March 1927; (Olinick); SMS #3, Winter 1966/67.

12. *The Veiled Prophetess*, May 1927; (unidentified).

13. *The Curse of Everard Maundy*, July 1927; (Hugh Rankin).

14. *Creeping Shadows*, August 1927; Rankin.

15. *The White Lady of the Orphanage*, September 1927; (Rankin); SMS #8, Spring 1968.

16. *The Poltergeist*, October 1927; (Rankin); M&M 1966.

17. *The Gods of East and West*, January 1928; (C.C. Senf, Rankin); SMS #5 Summer 1967.

18. *Mythistopholes and Company, Ltd.*, February 1928; (Rankin).

19. *The Jewel of Seven Stones*, April 1928; (Senf, Rankin).

20. *The Serpent Woman*, June 1928; (Rankin).

21. *Body and Soul*, September 1928; (Rankin).

22. *Restless Souls*, October 1928 (Rankin); M&M 1966.

23. *The Chapel of Mystic Horror*, December 1928, November 1952; (Rankin, Rankin).

24. *The Black Master*, January 1929; (Senf, Rankin).

25. *The Devil-People*, February 1929; (Rankin).

26. *The Devil's Rosary*, April 1929; (Rankin, Rankin).

27. *The House of Golden Masks*, June 1929; (Rankin, Rankin).

28. *The Corpse-Master*, July 1929; (Senf, Senf); M&M 1966.

29. *Trespassing Souls*, September 1929; (Senf).

30. *The Silver Countess*, October 1929; (Doak); M&M 1966.

31. *The House Without a Mirror*, November 1929; (Senf).

32. *Children of Ubasti*, December 1929 (Rankin); M&M, 1966.

33. *The Curse of the House of Phipps*, January 1930; (Senf, Senf); M&M 1966 (title changed to *The Doom of the House of Phipps*).

34. *The Drums of Damballah*, March 1930; (Senf, Senf).

35. *The Dust of Egypt*, April 1930; (Rankin, Rankin).

36. *The Brain-Thief*, May 1930; (Senf, Senf).

37. *The Priestess of the Ivory Fest*, June 1930; (Rankin).

38. *The Bride of Deceit*, July 1930; (Senf, Senf).

39. *Daughter of the Moonlight*, August 1930 (Rankin).

40. *The Druid's Shadow*, October, 1930 (Rankin, Rankin); SMS #6, Fall, 1967.

41. *Stealthy Death*, November 1930 (Senf).

42. *The Wolf of St. Bonot*, December 1930 (Rankin, Rankin); M & M 1966.

43. *The Lost Lady*, January 1931 (Senf, Senf).

44. *The Ghost-Helper*, February-March 1931 (unidentified; possibly Petrie.)

45. *Satan's Stepson*, September 1931 (Senf).

46. *The Devil's Bride*, 6-part serial, February-July 1932 (Senf, Doak); MOH, March, May, July 1969.

47. *The Dark Angel*, August 1932 (Jayem Wilcox).

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48. *The Heart of Silva*, October 1932 (Margaret Brundage, T. Wyatt Nelson).

49. *The Bleeding Mummy*, November 1932 (Wilcox).

50. *The Door to Yesterday*, December 1932 (Wilcox).

Notes on the Illustrations

The one and only time that Jules de Grandin appeared on a cover of *WEIRD TALES* was when Joseph Doolin painted him encountering the serpent in #2. His interior for the story is competent routine, and might have been drawn for any of a dozen other mystery stories. Brosnatch and Banta are quite forgettable, Petrie is not much better, and Olmick is memorable only for the fact that he couldn't draw, but his attempts occasionally resulted in some very weird grotesques. By comparison with the rest of black and white artwork for the first dozen tales, Olmick's effort for #7 is good.

With Hugh Rankin *WEIRD TALES* acquired its first artist who had distinct style and imagination, and the ability to project a personality that gave a character to the magazine, just as Frank R. Paul was the artist for the early *AMAZING STORIES* and *WONDER* titles and H. W. Wesso the artist for the early *ASTOUNDING STORIES*, even though neither were exclusive. Rankin was exclusive for WT for nearly two years, and for the first twelve issues his misty style, derived from a grease-pencil technique and coquilt, still breathes forth weirdness from the crumbling pages of these old issues, even though the quality varied with the quantity. Around the middle

of 1928 (he first appeared in the July 1927), he began to alternate his "soft" drawings with a harder style, which reproduced more clearly; and in 1929 to do some artwork in scratchboard. It was in 1929 that this new, harder style had taken on real character and, perhaps at the request of the editor, he began to sign these Doak. Thenceforward, "HR" was signed to the soft type picture, and "Doak" to the scratchboard, although he never went back to the true misty softness of the 19-27 and early 1928 illustrations. The de Grandin series did not get his best work, and to say his depiction of Jules was the best yet (aside from Doolin's cover) is not to say very much. The best was none too good. His covers for #s 23, 26, and 27 are bizarre enough.

C.C. Seaf did a few covers for *WEIRD TALES* which were both weird and imaginative to the point where his faults hardly mattered, but again not for this series, although his frontispiece for #28 is not too bad. He did not, at first, attempt to portray de Grandin, and it's too bad he didn't let well enough alone.

As we go along, the question of the age of our heroes becomes increasingly relevant. Mr. Quinn has never stated specifically, but he does tell us in the introduction to *The Phantom Fighter*, in 1966: "The petit Jules is now quite an old gentleman." Since no extraordinary claims for his age and vitality, such as those we encounter in relation to Sherlock Holmes, have been made, it does seem a reasonable assumption to place him around the age of 35 in 1925. This would make him 47 at the time the Finlay portrait was

drawn in 1937; Trowbridge is clearly older, and we are not told that he is still alive in 1966. All these considerations become relevant to really adequate artwork for the series.

As it happens, in a vast majority of instances, the artist evaded the issue by not portraying de Grandin and Trowbridge; and all considered, perhaps this is just as well.

C.C. Senf was a fairly competent pulp illustrator, not especially imaginative, and not very good on human figures and faces, though better than most of his predecessors. His style is open enough so that it reproduces rather well on pulp paper. A very good example of the sort of thing he did best is the interior double spread for #43, which could have appeared in any adventure magazine running stories about India. One interior is quite effectively weird, though routine: #33. One cover and interior are both effectively weird and imaginative: #38. And one illustration is, alas, quite unforgettable: #45, the worst, most completely inappropriate portraits of the partners that appeared throughout the entire series.

Rankin's cover for #35 was the last he would do for the series; it maintains the character he brought to the magazines; and his interiors for #39 and #60 have the soft qualities that made him memorable, al-

though he departed from the earlier misty style. De Grandin appears in only one picture, and is hardly distinguishable from dozens of other Rankin males. Petrie picks a good weird scene for his one appearance, but his hard style spoils it entirely.

For me, Doolin's series of six interiors for the monthly installments of *The Devil's Bride* (#46) are very fine, and my only complaints are that, in the opening double spread, Trowbridge and de Grandin look a little too similar and that de Grandin is not quite petit. But he has the feeling for the characters all through, and Jules is believable for a vigorous 37.

Jayem Wilcox was another generally competent illustrator, but, unlike Senf, he never learned how to allow for pulp paper reproduction, and a great deal is lost that need not have been had the editor insisted that he take a little care. De Grandin appears in his illustrations for #47 and #49; not disgracefully bad, but nowhere near as good as Doolin's, and Trowbridge just isn't believable. The single drawing by T. Wyatt Nelson is in the style that I enjoyed at the time and still do—but it is not a good portrayal of either of the characters. RAWL

The Hansom Cab

by Ken Porter

CLABBITS WAS ROARING DRUNK, and despite O'Flaherty's admonitions had become ungovernable. He had finally pinched a passing cigarette girl and they had been unceremoniously ejected. Now the young man lurched up Fifth Avenue towards Central Park. It was still relatively early, not yet nine, and the other pedestrians, grinning, gave him wide berth. Sighing, O'Flaherty followed after him. Entertaining out-of-town buyers was ordinarily a frightful bore, an unpleasant but necessary part of his duties; and when the buyer was the spoiled brat-son of one of their accounts . . .

"C'mon, ol' boy," Clabbitts waved him, "wanta ride in one of those horse-drawn carriages like I've read about. Clear the head, then back at 'em." The barking laugh of a wire-haired terrier.

They were in the fifties, where the cabs could usually be found moving up and down, picking up and discharging tourists, young lovers. O'Flaherty recalled having utilized their services himself in several amours, long ago, including the final one with his wife. There was nothing quite so conducive to putting a young woman in a receptive frame of mind

It was a fine ride, with a sweet girl, but something about a newspaper that O'Flaherty found in the hansom cab left him in the grip to terror . . .

Replying to our inquiry as to whether this was indeed a "first", KEN PORTER replied: "As you guessed, this is my first hit, that is, if you discount a short story I had published in a campus literary magazine back when I was at the University of Kansas, some fifteen years ago.

"I finally let that nagging in the back of my head get the best of me and started writing some three years ago. Since then I've garnered in excess of fifty rejection slips, although that isn't the sort of thing I keep an exact count on. I am a government attorney and do my writing in ionghand, about an hour a day, before the family is up, and the transcribing after work and on weekends. I find it helps keep me out of bars. I have tried my hand at most of the various forms, but am most at home in the horror and Damon Runyon genres."

as a ride in a hansom under the stars, the gentle breeze and the clip-clop of the horse's hooves lulling them, so to speak. But now, he thought wryly, a thunderstorm was brewing, imminent, and a ride with this set would improve neither his nor the driver's disposition.

Happily, there was not a cab in sight and Clabbitts cursed roundly. Only a few strollers and an old crone, wailing and clapping her hands as she came along. Clabbitts staggered and bumped her and she stared piercingly at them both before shuffling on down the sidewalk, emitting her dirge-like wail. In New York, you saw everything.

O'Flaherty tugged at his sleeve, "Come on now, there are no cabs about and it's going to rain. Let's back to your hotel for a nightcap. I think we've both had enough party for one evening."

Muttering, his young companion followed, but just then—and he cursed his luck—a large black hansom rounded the corner up the street and came down towards them, moving at a goodly pace. The carriage was rather longer than O'Flaherty recalled them being and it was all spit and polish, the silver on the horse's traces and the cab's trim gleaming brightly under the street lights.

Clabbitts waved but the cab showed no disposition to stop. O'Flaherty's spirits began to rise once more, when suddenly the young fool flung himself into the middle of the street, almost under the horse's hooves. The cabman had to draw up suddenly to avoid striking him and in a twinkling, Clabbitts was up on the running board and entering the carriage.

"Here now," the cabman cried, "I have a fare. Get down there, you."

O'Flaherty could not see his face with the high collar turned up and he thought it strange on such a warm evening, but then Clabbitts' grinning, whiskey-red face reappeared, and called, "Hey, pops, look what we have here. A sweet young thing to join us on our ride. Come on."

There were limits. He was not about to spend the night in the tank, courtesy of New York's finest, for being accessory to the molestation of some young woman in Central Park. He could see his wife's face when she saw the papers and O'Flaherty jumped up on the running board and grasped Clabbitts' arm firmly.

"Now come on, old man, don't be pestering these people. You'll have us in trouble for . . ." His voice was caught in mid-air when he looked inside. Clabbitts half-sat on the cushioned seat, his other arm encircling the slender waist of a beautiful young Irish girl clad in a long pink ankle dress not seen on the streets of New York in fifty years. She was smiling, her eyes bright, and she did not seem in the least afraid.

"I'm very sorry, miss," he said, "if my friend has disturbed you. I'm afraid he's had a bit too much to drink."

She answered in a tinkling, bell-like voice, with a touch of brogue you did not hear these days, one that used to make folks say, "Straight from the boat."

"Not at all, sir. He's all right, just a bit high spirited, as me mother used to say. Its about to rain, I fear, and you're welcome to join me if you like. It'll be a long bit of a ride though."

This had to be some sort of promotional gag and as long as it mollified this punk buyer . . . He stepped across the couple and sat on her other side. Immediately the carriage started up again, without another word from the cabman. All three were thrown back into the seat by the abrupt motion, then rocked forward. Both Clabbitts and the girl were laughing and, infected by their mirth, O'Flaherty could not resist a smile. If only the boy didn't start pinching her.

Clabbitts tightened his grip on the girl's waist and said, "You're a sweet child. What's your name, sugar?"

"Mary McGinnis, if you please, sir, and its happy to be out in the fresh air and under the skies once more that I am."

In the semi-darkness of the coach, illuminated only by the dim running lights on either side, her skin glowed translucent, white as alabaster. She seemed wasted, as after a long convalescence. It was almost as though they read his mind, for Clabbitts said, nuzzling her neck, "Have you been ill, Mary? You seem sort of drawn in," and she replied, "Indeed I have sir, for a long, long time, with a terrible cough, but now that's

all over, praised be to God. No more pain or sickness for Mary McGinnis and that's a fact!"

O'Flaherty was amused watching them and the ride was pleasant enough, but he felt he shouldn't sit there dumb as a stump—he'd make a poor impression on the account and that after all was what this was all about—so he joined in.

"If you will pardon my interrupting, what's with this dress, anyway, Mary? One doesn't often see such attire any more. A gag perhaps?"

Clabbitts was attempting to press his advantage and she held him off gently but not pushing him away either. Turning her head, she smiled that dazzling Irish smile at O'Flaherty.

"He's a sweet young man, your friend. Its been a long time since I've felt a man's touch except for the doctors." Clabbitts' hand apparently strayed too far, for she laughed and slapped at it, saying, "Whoosh now, you stop that sir and behave." Then back to O'Flaherty, "Gag, did you say, sir? I don't understand the meaning of the word, but isn't it a beautiful dress though? Me mother bought it special for the occasion." She smoothed the skirt with her free hand.

"You've been to a party then?"

"Well sir, I suppose you could call it that." She laughed easily, "Its a wake that I'm speaking of and I'll be going tomorrow, after a fashion. You look as though you might have a bit o' the blood in yourself and if you do, you'll know we Irish know how to treat death. Its a fine send-off we give our own."

Clabbitts' attentions had become more animated and she turned back to him with a little screaming giggle. "Now behave, you darling. There's plenty of time for it's a long ride we're taking."

O'Flaherty leaned back, resting his head on the high seat cushion. He gazed up at the sky. Low broken clouds scudded rapidly across his view, illuminated by flashes of lightning. The smell of rain was strong and sweet in the air. The rapid canto of the hooves on the pavement lulled him and he was about to close his eyes, to give the young couple a little privacy, when he felt something brush the back of his head.

He reached behind him and pulled down a folded newspaper from the shelf over the seat back. He was about to toss it on the floor and out of the way when his eye caught the flag: *THE WORLD*. O'Flaherty came awake, staring at the print in disbelief. Impossible! *THE WORLD* now lived only in memory and the library morgues. He held the paper up close in the dim flicker of the coach lamp and read the date. "July 14,

1903." His mind whirled. It was impossible. The paper crinkled fresh from the presses that day or the day before at the latest.

And now he was aware that the cab's speed had increased appreciably. The horse was at a gallop and they fairly flew along, the trees of the park flashing by. Neither Clabbits nor the girl seemed to notice, engrossed as they were in one another. Something was very wrong here; he shuddered as his grandmother's voice rang in his ears, as it had when he sat at her knee, listening to tales of the old country, thirty years before. He heard her words and remembered the old crone back when they caught the cab.

Now O'Flaherty was a hardheaded Irishman—no nonsense and all business—but terror gripped him just as when he was small and his mother had locked him in a dark closet as punishment. He seized Clabbits, who was just then engaged in planting a passionate kiss on the soft lips of Mary McGinnis, by the arm.

"We've got to get out of here. Straighten up hoy, and let's go."

His companion's head bobbed up and he snarled, "Leave me alone. Leave if you want. Don't worry, you've done your duty as host. I'll sign the order tomorrow. Just don't bother me now . . ." He started to bend his face back to Mary's, but she pushed it aside for a moment, and looked squarely at O'Flaherty with a wry, perplexing smile.

"I'm sorry, sir," she said, "but the coach won't stop again until we're there. I'm sorry."

"There" she had said. And where was "there"? The unspoken fear clawed at his throat and he reached up to the box and seizing the driver by the back of his coat, he shook him and shouted, "Stop the coach, cabman. Stop now, I say!" The coach was rolling faster now; it seemed inconceivable that a horse could run so fast. The scenery along the road was but a blur. Faster, faster . . .

He shouted again, "Stop, damn you, stop!" The coachman turned then, slowly, and O'Flaherty was staring into glazed red-rimmed eyes, but nothing else. There was no head above the stiff collar of the driver's cutaway coat, just the red eyes . . . He heard his grandmother's voice, "The Dullahan," and he pitched headlong from the side of the coach and lit in a swoon in the soft turf at the side of the path.

When he came to, O'Flaherty found that miraculously he was only a few hundred feet from the border of the Park. He staggered back to the lighted street, to civilization, to sanity, and sat down on a bench, throwing his head back, breathing deeply. The low broken clouds still

raced along overhead before the northeast wind and he thought he saw . . . a trick of the mind, for one of the clouds was shaped in the form of the coach and horse, now headless too, driving before the wind, higher, higher . . . He laughed shakily. Fear subsiding, he scolded himself for a blathering idiot.

"Superstitious old fool," he muttered, "Clabbitts will be at his hotel, ready to go, when you go by in the morning. With a grin on his face. He'll have had the girl and as a bonus a side-splitter to tell his friends, about a frightened old . . ."

He shook his head sorrowfully and looking down noticed he still held the newspaper clutched in his hand. But it could not be the same paper, for it was old and yellowed. O'Flaherty raised it slowly, almost afraid to look, and scanned the flag once more. "July 14, 1903." *THE WORLD*. The same paper, yet he was certain—if he could ever be certain of anything hereafter—that the paper had been fresh. You could have almost smelled the ink and the rag paper had crinkled crisply at his touch. It was as though his grandmother stood at his elbow once more, God rest her soul, whispering again the words that had sent delicious chills quivering down his spine and made him dive deep beneath the quilt at night . . .

"The coach-a-bower, black, all black, like an Englishman's heart, drawn by headless horses, and driven by the Dullahan, the headless demon. Following the banshees about, ready to carry off the poor damned souls . . ." Was it she guiding his hand as he opened the crumbling yellow paper and sought the obituaries? O'Flaherty scanned down the list, finding the one that leaped out at him from the sheet. *McGinnis, Mary, 20 years of age, of 6742 Brisbane, Brooklyn, passed away yesterday at the home after a lingering tubercular illness. Friends may call at the home where the remains will lie in state, commencing at noon.*

A gust of wind blew the newspaper from his nerveless hand and he watched it as it skittered along the street, disintegrating to scraps. His mind tried to shut out the horror, to grasp the concrete, the world he knew. Tomorrow he would say that he dropped Clabbitts at his hotel about nine, drunk as Hogan's goat but fit. He would say, "He wasn't there when I come by this morning, so I just assumed he'd caught a cab over here . . ."

They wouldn't be seeing the brash Mr. Clabbitts again—swallowed up by the big city, so to speak. It was indeed a long ride they were taking and he thought sadly of the girl. Such a pretty dress, just to be laid out in.

Inquisitions

MR. FAIRLEE'S FINAL JOURNEY by August Derleth

Mycroft & Moran, Sauk City,
Wisconsin 53583; 1968; 131pp; jacket by Frank Utpatel; \$3.50.

Many have been those who read all the stories and novels about Sherlock Holmes and yearned for more. Some, during the time that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was still with us in the flesh, wrote to The Agent (as he is known by loyal members of the Baker Street Irregulars and other Sherlockians) inquiring if there would be any further Sherlock Holmes stories coming, after a period of not-too-patient waiting; the last tale to be published, was *The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place* (*THE STRAND MAGAZINE*, April, 1927; *LIBERTY MAGAZINE*, March 5, 1927.) August Derleth was one of these.

As Vincent Starrett writes in his introduction to the first hardcover collection of Solar Pons stories, "*In re-Sherlock Holmes*": "Sir Arthur made no promises in his good-humored reply; so there and then young Mr. Derleth determined to carry on the tradition himself. A desk calendar stood at his elbow; he stabbed a finger into its pages at random and scribbled a note to himself: '*In re-Sherlock Holmes*.'" On that day, when it should have arrived, he told himself, he would write a story in imitation of the Master.

"The precise date of this important episode is lost to literary chronicle with the memorandum; but Derleth was attending the University of Wisconsin at the time, and when the day came he did actually sit down and write *The Adventure of the Black Narcissus* . . ."

The story, we are told, was sold immediately to Harold Hersey, and was published in the February 1929 issue of *DRAGNET MAGAZINE*.

Derleth was not, of course, the first to write a serious pastiche of Sherlock Holmes (serious, as related to burlesques), but he was the first to start out and follow through on his plan of continuing the Sherlock Holmes series—not, though, imitating Dr. Watson, as John Dickson Carr and Adrian Doyle did many years later. While not diffident about his ability, even at that relatively tender age, Derleth realized that this would not only be beyond his powers, but was not a good idea in the first place.

What he did was to create two new characters, Solar Pons, and his colleague, Dr. Parker, who greatly resembled Holmes and Watson in many crucial ways, yet were distinct people in their own right; the setting was London, but early twentieth century London, rather than the London of Holmes's day; and the sort of crimes which come to Solar Pons's attention, as well as Pons's methods, have a similar feeling to that you find in Dr. Watson's narratives. It is more of a reincarnation than a

revival. The new series "caught on", although the effects of the depression upon Mr. Hersey resulted in Derleth's market being cut off, so that the production of Solar Pons tales at that time was curtailed.

Nonetheless, Derleth returned to Solar Pons from time to time, as conditions permitted; and in 1945, the first collection, referred to above, was issued by Mycroft & Moran. There have been four since, as well as the delightful *Preced Street Dossier*, which contains accounts of four complete cases, two previously unpublished, as well as many interesting glimpses of Pons from Dr. Parker's notepooks. A year or so ago, when I learned that Derleth had completed the exact number of short stories about Pons which we find in the Sherlock Holmes canon, I asked him if it wasn't time to do some Solar Pons novels, to round out the parallel. He replied that he was working on the first Solar Pons novel.

And here it is, well worth the waiting for.

The problem presented to Pons is one worthy of the attention of Holmes himself. A Mr. Jonas Fairies set out from Frome, Somerset for London, but never arrived. His body is discovered, and, concealed in the lining of his hat, is Solar Pons's address. There is no indication of why he was coming to see Pons, and no apparent motive for murder; nor again any leads for the police.

The reasonably well-read lover of puzzle detective stories may correctly solve one or both of the two riddles presented, as I did, but I do not believe that this will in any way spoil the pleasure of reading this story, or re-reading it every now and

then. (And I have found that where, at times, I will hit upon the correct answer, or the essence of it, I may find—as I did here—that I actually missed some essential clues which pointed the way unmistakably; so that the final revelation did contain some surprises for me.)

As in the best writing of this nature, the reader is skillfully misdirected, but there is no flummery of such a nature as to arouse resentment. Derleth is tricky, but nonetheless plays fair with the reader.

Now, Mr. D.—what about the other three novels?

Meanwhile, *Mr. Fairies's Final Journey* is warmly recommended.
RAWL

THE SHERLOCKIAN DOYLE

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Man with the Watches* and *The Lost Special* with a special introduction by Lord Donegal, B. S. I. (original illustrations by Roy Hunt). Luther Norris, 3844 Watska Avenue, Culver City, California; 90230; 46pp. quarto; \$3.00.

Like *The Problem of the Purple Maculae*, which appeared last year, this is a well printed pamphlet on excellent and durable paper, in a limited edition of 500 copies. The two stories are, to the best of my knowledge and belief, unobtainable elsewhere, and both are very fine mystery puzzles, in the best tradition of the Sherlock Holmes series.

Lord Donegal's introduction is a fascinating one, raising the question, as it does, if these two tales might have been written by Holmes himself. Two stories in the canon are explicitly by Holmes himself: *The*

Adventure of the Blanched Soldier, and *The Adventure of the Lion's Mane*; some Irregulars would add at least one further case in the canon to the list—but this is something for discussion elsewhere.

My own suggestion would be that here The Agent tried his hand at a pastiche of Dr. Watson's narratives (and may, indeed, have obtained some data about the problems themselves from Watson). We know that Sir Arthur could write a rather good mystery story on his own, and in not a few of The Agent's own stories, we find more than a little that is reminiscent of tales in the canon, one way or another. (Surely the man who created Professor Challenger was influenced by the writings of Dr. Watson!)

Recommended to all Holmesians, whether or not connected with any Sherlock Holmes society. RAWL

PUBLICATIONS

THE BAKER STREET JOURNAL (An Irregular Quarterly of Sherlockiana). Julian Wolff, M. D. Editor; \$4 a year from Dr. Wolff, 33 Riverside Drive, New York, N. Y. 10023.

This is the senior publication of the senior society of Sherlockians in the United States, The Baker Street Irregulars. The subtitle indicates mainly that it is a more or less official organ of the BSI, and suggests perhaps that the issues may not always appear like clockwork—but one does receive four a year.

Photo-offset it contains all manner of both serious and non-serious material relating to the Sherlock Holmes

stories; and while any issue may contain items which you consider trivial (but which someone else will find charming, amusing, etc.) each one contains some really fascinating studies of one or more aspects of Sherlockiana. If what you have read about it here tickles your interest, so that you feel you might enjoy this very specialized sort of fandom, you can start anytime by subscribing to the *Journal*.

As the Late Christopher Morley said of "the writings about the writings", many years ago, when the number of Irregulars was far smaller than it is today (if we include all the offshoot or "action" societies in various parts of the country): "Never before has so much been written by so many for so few." RAWL

THE ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE, A Quarterly Journal Devoted to the Appreciation of Mystery, Detective and Suspense Fiction. Allen J. Hublin, Editor; \$3.00 for four issues; 3656 Midland, White Bear Lake, Minnesota, 55110.

This letter size publication, 68 pages neatly offset in small but perfectly readable type, came to me as a surprise; it has been going a little more than a year, and covers the entire range of crime fiction, as the subtitle indicates.

The October 1968 issue contained, among many other items, a survey and complete bibliography of works of the British mystery story author, John Creasey, tracking down the innumerable pseudonyms, and noting his writings in other fields as well. There is the first of a series of articles about the late Cornell Wool-

rich; a survey of films about the great literary detectives and criminals, ranging from silent shorts and feature lengths to the present; the article by John Christopher, *Poe and the Detective Story*, to which I referred in the editorial; Part II of a series, *Mystery Rides the Rails* (Railroad Short Stories of Mystery and Detection); Mystery news notes; and reviews of latest films and books.

If you are widely read in one or more of the great or popular detective characters of fiction, in addition to Holmes, then there's a good chance that you will find this interesting, even when you come upon a long survey dealing with an author of whose writings you haven't read a single word. I haven't read Creasey at all, for instance, but the 22 pages devoted to him were fascinating—18 of them are bibliography. RAWL

THE ROHMER REVIEW, Edited and Published for The Sax Rohmer Society by Douglas A. Roseman, 365 Centenary Drive, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70808. Membership in the society (including two issues of the

Review) costs \$1.00 annually, payable to the Editor.

Recent years have seen a revival of the Fu Manchu series, all but one of which, I believe, are now in print (I have not been able to locate *The Bride of Fu Manchu* and the publisher informed me a year or so ago that it was no longer available), as well as some of the other novels, and the series, Morris Klaw, detective. So I suppose it is only natural that a Sax Rohmer society would arise—why not, if we can have a Count Dracula Society?

While my fondness for Rohmer does not approach the level of my fondness for Doyle, Chesterton, Christie, Stout, Van Dine, or Carr, I did find the second issue of this publication interesting; and if you enjoy Fu Manchu, I rather think you'll be interested in the Society, too. *The Review* is quarto size, like *Baker Street Journal* but has no more than half the number of pages, nor is it as well printed—but my copy of the second issue was entirely readable. At \$1, I'd say it was worth trying. RAWL

The Veil of Tanit

by Eugene de Reszke

When I first saw the name EUGENE de REZSKE on the contents page of the March 1932 *STRANGE TALES*, early in January that year, I remembered having read a good story by him in Hugo Gernsback's *AMAZING DETECTIVE TALES*, a couple of years earlier. But that is all that I've run across about this author; apparently he was a regular pulp story writer who happened to drop in to our field twice.

CARL MARQUART, traveler and adventurer, was thumbing a catalog case in the reference department of the great library at Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue when his attention was suddenly drawn to the face of a man at the next table similarly occupied.

And the last warning was: "Some day soon you will forget or neglect to wear the Veil of Tanit. That day will be your day of doom. You will die."

Marquart's prolonged regard was strange, for, to the ordinary observer, there was nothing about the man to attract the slightest notice. Small and pudgy of stature, soft looking, unobtrusively dressed, he was altogether the mousy sort of person one would expect to see bending over a ledger at a high desk or in a minor professorial chair. It was something on his face that was in utter contradiction to this appearance that so held Marquart. Not his features, for they were in absolute agreement with the rest of him — no, it was the tan on that face that amazed him.

Marquart had just returned from a little adventure in Al Yemen in Arabia to his no small profit, incidentally. And Marquart had just such a tan himself, perhaps slightly lighter if anything. Now Marquart knew tans. There is a world of difference in tans. There is the tan you get in the Canadian woods of a summer. There is the tan you acquire in Florida of a winter if you can afford one. And there is the tan that burns into your skin under the Congo sun in a season's big-game shoot. This stranger's wasn't any of these.

His tan was nothing but a desert tan. A little closer inspection and Marquart narrowed it down either to that of the Sahara or to the Arabian; there was not the slightest doubt of it, he decided. No other sun ever produced that combination of color, that dark brown that in certain lights took on a purplish hue and radiated darkly emanations of stored heat.

Marquart was tremendously interested. What business would such a person have in mid-Sahara or deep Arabia?

He forgot the book he was looking for and became lost in this speculation. The stranger turned and seeing himself observed became nervous. He gave Marquart one startled glance and hurried off to the ticket desk. There he handed in his slips, got his seating ticket and disappeared into the reading room.

Marquart's amused eyes looked after the scurrying figure until it was out of sight, and then he followed. As he entered the reading room Marquart took the first book that came to hand from the shelves inside, located his quarry and took a seat some distance away, but one which afforded him a plain view of the little fellow.

His curiosity consumed him. A regular bloodhound for the strange, the unusual, the bizarre, the exotic, Marquart's accurate observation told him that here was a riddle and an enigma. Could he solve it? Perhaps, if he caught the man's eye, if he smiled at him casually and had a smile in return so that he could go over to the man and say

plainly: "My name is Carl Marquart and I also have just returned from the desert where I had a pretty little adventure. If you've nothing to do in the next hour or so, let's tell our respective stories to each other."

Idle thoughts, these, as he sat slumped back in the chair, his eyes on the man.

The stranger suddenly raised his head from the book. Their eyes met, Marquart essayed a slightly embarrassed smile. It was, he felt at once, rude, uncalled for. He was prepared for a glance of contempt in return. But he certainly wasn't prepared for what followed.

As their eyes met the stranger's face blanched under the tan—went pale. His eyes, even from that distance, Marquart saw, distended with nothing less than terror. It was a look of such haunting fear that it froze Marquart's smile on his face.

The man arose abruptly and almost ran out of the reading room.

Marquart decided that he had gone far enough. Plainly, his interest had disturbed the little man profoundly. Well, that was that. He tried to read the book before him, to forget the strange episode. But it was no use. He wasn't in the least interested in *The Economic Aspects of the Industrial Revolution in England*. He shut the tome with a bang that brought him some nasty looks from the readers about him and slunk out of the reading room.

In no hurry, and still thinking of the incident he took the steps down to the Fifth Avenue exit. As he neared the bottom, that unfailing perception of men who have known and contended with nature in her primitive moods told him, even in this great marble hall, that he was being watched.

From the corner of his eye Marquart searched the hall. Sure enough, there, behind a marble column was that unaccountable man, his eyes riveted on Marquart. Marquart thereupon turned and smiled. The man left his position and walked over to the water front further down the hall. Marquart smiled to himself as he saw the fellow take out and swallow a powder paper and drink it down with water. Just what you'd expect, Marquart mused.

"One of these after each meal, Mr. Smith," he could almost hear the doctor saying, "and one before going to bed. It will do your liver a world of good and tone up the system. And how's business, by the way?"

And certainly it was an amazing tonic, that powder. For, as Marquart stood there the man came toward him. Gone was the fear in those

eyes, the shrink in the body. The man came over with a quite genial smile.

"I see you are interested in me."

"Yes, very much indeed."

The obvious retort, "Why?" didn't come. Instead the little man regarded Marquart steadily for a moment with a quizzical, puzzling, unfathomable look.

"My name is Carl Marquart." The man smiled. "Names. Do they matter? Call me Smith if you wish." And again that puzzling look now spread to the corners of the mouth in a wry little smile as if he and Marquart were both in on some droll story.

"Smith? Smith? . . . Why, that's very suitable. Just the name I had in mind. How do you do, Mr. Smith?"

Smith looked at his watch. "I have just half an hour, Mr. Marquart, before an appointment. I have no doubt that you'd wish to accompany me for a little walk there. It's a beautiful day."

"Why, I'd be delighted, Mr. Smith. I won't deny that I'd like to hear you talk if you would. I'm sure the story —"

"Oh, yes, yes. The story. It is an amazing story, Mr. Marquart, simply astounding. I shall tell it to you." Smith slapped his thigh and went into a burst of laughter. "Yes. That would be effective. That would be the thing. I shall tell you what happened to me in detail and you will be the only man to know it from beginning to end. Yes. From the very beginning to the very end. Otherwise, it would remain forever untold. First of all, because I don't know a soul I could tell it to; and secondly — well, secondly, it happened to *me*. To *me*, you understand. That in itself is astounding!"

They walked through the great doors and were soon on Fifth Avenue. Smith turned downtown with the silent Marquart at his side. In the sweet spring sun the little man expanded and became animated. He began his story and Marquart forgot the sun and the sky, the time, the place, the circumstances. For he was listening to one of the strangest stories in all the annals of adventure.

"UNTIL TWO YEARS AGO," Smith began, "there was, in all the world, but one individual with whom I was intimate enough to call him friend. And he has gone.

"When I was a boy, I was a puny little fellow and soon learned to turn inward that normal energy which only brought me insult and ridicule from my school fellows. I had a strong sense of life, of adventure,

of daring. I built castles and dreamed dreams. My physique chained my energy but not my fancy. I took to reading omnivorously and soon came to prefer history above all other types of literature. It was the only food that came near to appeasing that hunger for adventure in me. Excluded from the world of mundane things I slew dinosaurs, drew plans for pyramids, commanded a legion in the Punic wars and was Alexander's closest adviser.

"I am trying to convey to you how intense was my longing for living actively, physically, intensely. What do you think I became? A professor of ancient history in a small mid-western college where I lived and taught obscurely until two years ago, until my forty-ninth year. In all my life, until that time, nothing had happened to me. Nothing had even come near to happening to me. Absolutely nothing.

"I told you I had one friend. His name was Peter Armand, a resident of our little college town. We were drawn together because of a similarity of interests. I was a professor of ancient history. He was a collector in a limited way of Egyptian and Persian antiques—vases, trinkets, coins, bits of statuary, and so forth. He was, like myself, a bachelor and a recluse of simple tastes. His only pleasure was his occasional trips abroad, from which he'd come back loaded with all sorts of pieces. Most of them were devoid of interest. Many were fakes. But now and then he'd come back with a real find, and we'd discuss it for days and weeks before it went into that part of his collection which he valued most.

"There you have the background of my life. Can you imagine anything more placid, anything more rooted and riveted? But listen.

"It all started because of a newspaper write-up. Armand had allowed a Sunday paper of a nearby city to photograph and reproduce some of his pieces. Among these was a photograph of a certain very ancient and crudely, but profusely, carved block of scarred metal that might have been a box except that there was no apparent means of ingress into it. It had no joints, no hinges, no seams, no lid of any kind. I had hardly even glanced at it, and Armand never mentioned it that I can remember.

"Early one evening about three months after these pieces had been brought out in the paper he telephoned me to come over.

"'Smith,' he said as soon as I had arrived, 'I have just had an interesting visit from an extremely interesting stranger. What do you make of the name?' He handed me a card which bore upon it one word: Eochim.

"The word strikes an echo somewhere in the depths of my brain," I told him. "But don't expect me to unearth it. My mind is a regular junkshop of obscure jetsam of every description."

"Well, what do you think this Eochim was here for? He wanted that box affair."

"I suppose you told him that you never sell anything out of your rummage bag."

"I would have if he'd asked to buy it. He didn't. He said that the thing belonged to him—no, to his people. That's what he said. To his people. That it had been unlawfully abstracted three centuries ago by Shah Lelaad of Irak, since when it had been lost track of until it appeared that I had it."

"Interesting if true," I said.

"Oh, I believe it's true enough, Smith. Up to that point friend Eochim sounded logical enough. But then he demanded the box, and I refused him pointblank, naturally. Do you know what his counterthrust was? A good old-fashioned magic threat. He said that he was in no hurry. He'd get it all right after my doom had overtaken me—just like that."

"Let's see the box or whatever it is," I said. "There must be something to it."

"About an hour later there came a telephone call by long distance from the next state where a brother of Armand and his old mother lived on a farm. His brother was on the wire. I know he recognized his voice immediately. His mother had suddenly been taken sick and the brother wanted to know if he would come the next morning. He said he would, of course. And then he spoke to the old family physician who was attending her. After he hung up he decided he would not wait until morning after all. He telephoned an automobile-renting firm in the city and engaged a powerful car with a chauffeur to make the trip then and there.

"I remained in his house intending to give this antique a real inspection. I was all alone, Armand's housekeeper having left for the night. I lifted the metal block from its pedestal and brought it onto the large library table and under a strong reading light. I wondered then how I had ever missed noticing the thing. For, from the first close glance it captured my interest completely. I knew I was in for a work of hours so I decided I'd stay over, and, to make myself comfortable, I went upstairs and brought down a suit of pajamas, a dressing gown and slippers. There was a couch in the library, and, intending to sleep here

if sleep could tear me loose from that box, I donned the pajamas and robe and went to work.

"The antique was about two feet square and about one foot deep. It appeared to be made of bronze, roughly hammered. The carvings I mentioned covered its every surface. These appeared to have been done simply by working a sharp instrument into the surface of the metal, and so, outlining the figures. I soon discovered that all those figures were simply different attitudes and postures of the same person and that person was none other than Tanit, the great goddess of Carthage, the deity of plenty and fertility, second in power only to Moloch, and a divinity of the most popular cult of the Punic republic.

"I can tell you I was impressed. If the thing was genuine it was a rarity of rarities. For the Romans did such a thorough job in the destruction of Carthage that, although its civilization was contemporary with that of Rome, research has discovered little that would permit us to reconstruct its life directly. All we know of Carthage is still in the writings of Romans, their inveterate enemies. Nevertheless even the prejudiced Romans attest to the perfection of its crafts and the splendor of its arts. That was why these crude carvings puzzled me so. The thing had so patently been intended for permanence that the indifferent workmanship of the figures was puzzling, paradoxical.

"I studied the figures and noted that the attitudes of Tanit were distinctly threatening, warlike. She was represented with a sword, with a brand of fire, with a bowl of pitch and sulphur. In other postures she seemed to be hurling anathemas, uttering fearful curses, and so on. Not once did she appear in her natural character as the placid and voluptuous Tanit whose business was the very opposite of war and destruction.

"The problem presented by these two paradoxes—the crudeness of the art and the strange attitudes of Tanit—threw me into a fever of excitement. To a professor of ancient history that in itself would be in the nature of an adventure. Suddenly I remembered that Armand owned a very powerful magnifying glass.

"So faint, that even by the aid of the glass it took me hours to decipher it, was an inscription in Roman characters, sandwiched in between the figures. Here was another surprise: Roman characters on a Carthaginian antique? But when I deciphered that writing it all came to me at last. What drama!

Herein by the Kochim, the Dead; the Zaimph of Tanit. The

dread vengeance of Tanit pursue the generations forever of him who touches . . .

"In the small house approaching dawn I reconstructed in my mind a scene. Scipio Africanus II was hattering at the walls of a doomed Carthage. In the marvelous temple of Tanit, the ancient Eochim—the family of Tanit priests, heirs to all the secret knowledge of Ur and Babylon and Egypt before them—gathered outside the innermost sanctuary that enshrined the Veil of Tanit, known as the Zaimph, the very essence of the deity.

"To touch the Zaimph was death; to even look upon it was the most horrible of sacrilege. 'Herein by the Eochim, the Dead . . .' What else could it mean but that the Eochim had put the Zaimph into this metal block that was indeed a box, a box upon which the threatening postures of the goddess had been hastily chiseled and the line written for the special benefit of the Romans whose entry into the city was now but a matter of days. And then, having touched and looked upon the Zaimph they themselves were 'The Dead.' They all immediately committed suicide!

"And in surged the conquering Romans, ploughing Carthage and its civilization into fine dust to the hysterical scream of Cato that reached them from across the Mediterranean: '*Delenda est Carthago!*' Carthage must be destroyed!

"But this box? None had touched it!

"I was mad with an excitement that had me trembling from head to foot. Was it possible that in this bronze casket reposed the most famous, the most dreaded sacred object antiquity, the Zaimph itself?

"I lifted the box and shook it. Not a sound. Where was the lid? How had those cunning priests sealed it so there was no trace left? I dipped a cloth in benzine and rubbed at the surfaces until they were polished clean. Then, with the glass, I began a minute examination, inch by inch. I came across a small particle of a different metal encrusted upon the bronze in one corner. I scratched it bright with my knife, and it looked like lead. Why was it there? It looked for all the world like a deep set plug. I fetched up a box of tools.

"From this I selected a sharp and stout awl and began hammering it gently into the lead spot. It was deep. The awl hit into the metal three inches, and then, of a sudden, there was a sharp hiss of air that jerked the tool handle back into my palm. Simultaneously one side panel of the box flew open striking the table a resounding blow as it fell flat upon it. It was held to the inside of the box by an ingenious, inner hinge.

"Do you understand how that box had been sealed? Think of it! *They had created a vacuum that had lasted for over two thousand years!* And that was part of the knowledge that Rome destroyed.

"Do you remember Flaubert's attempt at a description of the Veil of Tanit? He spent half a lifetime on research of Carthaginian life and and here is what he says of it 'It was bluish—like night; yellow—like dawn; and crimson—like the sun; harmonious, diaphanous, glittering and light. This was the mantle of the goddess, the sacred Zaimph, which no one might behold!' And here was I, an obscure pedagogue in an obscure mid-western town in the U. S. of America, beholding it. The Veil of Tanit!

"It lay folded tight and wrapped about in white cloth, as fresh and bright and glittering and diaphanous as the day it had been put in. Trembling in every limb, my teeth chattering, half believing I would drop dead any minute, I uncoiled it and spread it out to its full length, and, absolutely spellbound, hypnotized, I regarded it for minutes and minutes. I forgot myself completely, forgot my surroundings; forgot where I was, or in what century I lived. I was back in Carthage, a worshipper of Tanit and terrorized by the sacrilege I was committing.

"The mood switched. Now I was a barbarian chief from across the Pyrenees, and my name was Matho. I had stolen the Zaimph and was wearing it, walking boldly through the despairing populace of Carthage to my army of three hundred thousand men on the plains below. None touched me. They averted their heads at my approach even while desiring with all their souls to tear me to pieces. For they felt I was taking with me the thing that made Carthage great. I knew that Hamilcar, their great general, was destined to wipe me and my armies off the face of the earth for this sacrilege. Yet the feeling of momentary power I had was so tremendous . . .

"I think it was unconsciously, that, musing thus, I took off my robe and the pajamas and lifting the Veil over me I inserted my head into the hole in the middle and let it fall about my naked shoulders in mantle fashion. The Zaimph enveloped me, rippling softly about my body, billowing down to my ankles. It covered me voluminously from neck to feet. How can I describe what it did to me? It seemed to make me grow a foot taller in stature, to bulge out my flabby muscles into knots of cast iron, to unsurge into every corner of my being will and power and daring and strength.

"The sharp ring of the doorbell broke rudely into my little act and threw me almost into a fit.

"Hastily I drew on my clothes over the Zaimph, hardly conscious of my surroundings. I closed the box and put it back on its pedestal. The doorbell kept ringing.

"When I opened it a stranger stood at the threshold. He had on an ordinary business suit of blue and carried a cane. He was rather tall and spare and very dark. On his chin was the strangest beard I had ever seen. It was short, but it had two points, and was waved horizontally. The hair of it was black and tightly curled. In his lapel was a sprig of some flower that I had never seen before and it smelled strongly with a soft penetrating odor. His eyes were black as night and deep as abysses and they never left my face.

"I knew who he was. I whispered it.

"'Eochim!'

"He bowed slightly and followed me into the library. His voice was deep and vibrant, and he spoke perfect English as only educated foreigners can speak it.

"'I was strolling by and noticed the light,' he said. It did not occur to me that there was anything unusual in a stroll at dawn. 'You are—?' he inquired.

"'Professor Smith,' I answered. 'A friend of Mr. Armand.'

"'Then you will be interested in this. I imagine you don't yet know—'

"He extended a newspaper to me. It was the morning paper. I read the headlines hurriedly: Peter Armand dead. Auto accident. Terribly burned and lacerated. Tortures. Hospital. Death. Struck a tree off the road. Chauffeur miraculously untouched. Car demolished.

"'I have come for that box,' Eochim said after a minute. 'It is mine. It has been stolen. That is why your friend is now dead. Three centuries ago it was stolen from us by one of Shah Jelaad's men who had come with a caravan to buy frankincense from us.' Eochim glanced down at the sprig of flower on his lapel. 'That man died in the Ruba-el-Khali, in the "Place of Loneliness" upon the desert in horrible torture. To Shah Jelaad and to his household the box brought death and misfortune of every kind; to him and to his heirs. Peter Armand bought it from a Persian knowing it had been stolen from the subterranean treasure coffers of a palace in Iraq. That eunuch is now a leper in Shiraz and Peter Armand is dead. The time has come. It shall repose once more within our temple.'

"'You are an Eochim,' I whispered, 'a priest of Tanit? Where? Where upon this earth is Tanit worshipped?'

"The stranger gave me a startled look. 'How do you know?'

"Ah, I know more, Eochim, Much more. That box contains . . .

"A repressed cry escaped his lips. But I went on, suddenly enjoying his amazement. "'The Veil of Tanit! The Zaimph!'

"Eochim ran to the box and snatched it under his arm. I laughed exultingly, possessed of an inexplicable frenzy. For the first time in my life something was happening that involved me, something that I felt was smeared with the brush of danger, stamped with the seal of adventure, signed with the leering signature of death itself. Now was my chance to plunge into the thick of it. I laughed hoarsely.

"'No, Eochim. It is not there. The Zaimph is gone. The box is open. I have the Veil, Eochim! I am wearing it! It is mine! Shall I show it to you . . . ?' I made a movement of my hand toward my shirt front. Eochim believed. He fell on his knees with his face to the floor.

"'No! No!' he cried. 'It is death. It is sacrilege! You are doomed!'

"'I am not afraid, Eochim! It is not death to me. It is life and power! See how you cringes before me?'

"He had gotten up slowly with face averted from me and as soon as he was on his feet he ran from the house.

"I knew I was going to hear from my friend, Eochim. I longed for the adventure to develop. I couldn't eat or sleep; I couldn't work, I was another man. And since I couldn't attend my classroom duties. I resigned and left town, a few days later, taking the box with me and wearing, for precaution, the mantle of Tanit.

"A good thing it was, too, for Eochim had me kidnaped one night. Bundled, tied hand and foot and gagged, I was thrown into an automobile and taken to a coast city. If I had not been wearing the Zaimph I would have been done for along the way. But he was beside me in the car during the journey and I warned him. The next thing I knew I was a prisoner in a dark hole of a freight hatch. The lurching motion told me I was already on the high seas, and the violence of the movement impressed me with the fact that the vessel was some battered hulk of a tramp that knew the tropic seas and their frowzy ports better than it knew the Atlantic.

"The sea journey must have taken months; actually months. During that time I was more dead than alive. When I was taken out at last it was in the deep of night. Within an hour of our arrival there was a cavalcade of camels ready, and, perched under awning in a takht-rawan of two camels, like a prince or some great potentate, except that I was

securely bound, we were on our way into the desert, into the 'Place of Loneliness,' the Ruba-el-Khali itself.

"The desert journey must have taken more months. Half the time I was unconscious from the torture of my bonds. It was only in the cool nights that some spirit came back to me. During the day that terrible sun beat into my little shelter atop the camels as if the canvas was made of gauze. The tilt of the animals bruised my soft body into blotches of insensible flesh.

"At last we reached a great salt lake, skirted its shores for a day and came to a range of quite lofty hills. We reached these hills at night. They were covered with verdure which gave off a perfume that drenched the night. We pressed on over them through a pass and came one morning to a great oasis nestling in a valley. Tall palms rose into the air, and houses of white sandstone trimmed with red brick and profusely balconaded shone through the trees.

"As we neared I heard the murmur of running water and the tumult of a town. We entered a great gate into a wide street and I saw in a square at the end of this street a great and beautiful temple of curious design. I knew it was no mosque and I knew these people were not Moslems. During the journey, instead of the five daily prayers, there was only one stop for prayer and that was at high noon. And it was not a prayer. It was an act of adoration, to the sun. And at night there would be another such to the moon when it was high. These were fire-worshippers, Shamanaim, devotees of Moloch-baal, the sun god, and of Tanit, the moon goddess.

"Through surging crowds of people we proceeded until we reached the temple. There I was taken down, unbound, and ordered to wash my hands and face. Frankincense was given me to put on my hair and rub upon my hands. When I was ready I was ushered in through magnificent corridors of flagstone and alabaster to a high ceiled apartment. I was taken through many rooms.

"But at last I stood before a great dais supported by unspeakable figures and shaped in the form of a great belly. Upon this dais, in a milk white robe with crimson facings, sat Eochim. At his feet upon the platform was the box of the Veil of Tanit. He bade me sit.

"'My friend,' he said, 'consider your situation carefully. You are in Al Khartoug, the city of the Bent-Khartougs, descendants of the refugees from the destruction of Carthage. We trace our lineage directly to the great families of Carthage, to the Barcas, the Hannos, the Schanhabarim, children the Baal-gods of antiquity. I am the supreme power

here with one associate, the high priest of the Moloch. You are completely in my power.

"Know then that you are destined for a terrible death. That is inescapable, inevitable, and in the hands of Tanit herself. I am willing to leave it in her hands. I will leave here for half an hour. If you will take off the Zaimph and put it back within the box and remain undressed so that I may see that you do not have it I shall give you a royal escort and see that you get back safely to America as far as it is in the power of a human being to do so. For I believe that you will die, anyway.

"If you do not do that, if you refuse to return what does not belong to you, but to us, we shall have to devise ways of taking it from you. In that case I promise you that no human being ever endured the torture you will be put through.'

"My veins were pounding with excitement and with exultation. For months I had turned the situation over in my mind. What could they do? If, it was death to see or touch the Veil, if they indeed believed that, how could they molest me? Killing me would mean tearing the Zaimph by dagger or bullet and tainting it with my blood. They could poison me, true. But then who would strip the corpse, who would disrobe me of the sacred mantle? The priest's offer itself confirmed me. I myself was to put the Zaimph back into the box. And the only way he would verify that would be to see that I did not have it on me! What belief in the Veil, in its sacred character and in its powerful tabu, that signified!

"Was I going to cheat myself of playing such a role as I could see unfolding before me? Did I get so far in my adventure only to lie down and cry quits. Unthinkable! I was going to go through with it, death or no death, torture or no torture. The feel of the Zaimph next to my skin sent a wave of power and exultation through my whole being.

"'You can have my answer right now, Eochim,' I cried. 'It is no! And what are you going to do about it?'

"At this juncture another man entered. He was an impressive looking individual, extraordinarily tall. He wore a toga of shimmering yellow and on his breast a shining plate set with blazing jewels. His beard covered his chest and almost hid a face cast in evil lines. Eochim stepped down from the dais, and they engaged in a whispered conversation. Eochim's face was troubled, but the other one's shone with an ironic malignancy. I knew of course that the tall one was a priest of

Moloch by his robe and the equality with which the two conversed; he was the high priest, and, also, co-ruler with Eochim. If Eochim asked his counsel in the dilemma he got no help from the Molochite for the latter soon left, laughing as if at a joke and casting what I took to be a glance of admiration in my direction.

"'Whatever your motive may be,' Eochim said to me after an interval, 'you are certainly a man of great courage. Who would have suspected it!' He had a charming smile as he spoke. In fact the fellow was, by every standard, a gentleman. 'I must take time to think this out clearly and if you will give me your word, Professor, that you will guard the mantle from exposure I shall turn you loose until we decide what shall be done. Don't think of escaping. It would be folly, and you would perish on the desert before a day is gone. Besides, you would be tracked down with ease.'

"That suited me. I gave him my word and went out upon the street. There, in front of the temple, a great crowd was assembled, and, as I emerged into the sunlight, the assemblage gave up a murmur and all knelt on hands and knees before me as if I were a god. So they knew I was wearing the Zaimph! You can imagine my feelings. Not even in the wildest dreams of my boyhood days had my soaring imagination placed me in such a position. I enjoyed it immensely. For the first time in my life I was supremely happy with the realization of the extent of my power.

"I descended among the people. Saving the men who once a year guided a caravan of frankincense to the coast none had ever seen a blond-haired man before. This distinguishing mark, added to the fact that I wore the mantle without dropping dead on the spot, endowed me with the attributes of divinity. As I came down they parted before me, dreading to touch me.

"For months I was free in Al-Khartoug. I refused a house offered me and chose to live in a tent in an open space so that I could see and hear all about me. They spoke Arabic, a tongue whose roots I am familiar with, so that it was not difficult for me to piece their talk together. And I circulated freely among them and was treated everywhere as if I were a valuable piece of delicate china. Continually I marvelled at the inaction of Eochim whom I seldom saw, but at length I understood the reason from snatches of conversation I overheard and the character of political undercurrents that I caught.

"It seems that the town was split in two great factions: the supporters of Tanit, and those of Moloch. The Moloch cult had enjoyed the greater

power since the disappearance of the Veil these three hundred years. They were loath to see the other party come back into power which the recovery of this sacred object would certainly bring about. For Tanit was a cult devoid of the cruelty and the bloodthirsty character of Moloch, and the Veil was by far the most sacred symbol in their entire religion. Ahrim, the high priest of Moloch, therefore, had been putting every possible obstacle in the way of Eochim, to recover the Veil.

"I learned that it had been proposed to cast chances so that he upon whom the symbol fell was to either strangle or poison me: that is, kill me in a neat and bloodless manner, then strip me of the Veil, return it to its box, and commit suicide. It was this plan of Eochim's that Ahrim opposed, and he was strongly upheld in his opposition, of course. No one wanted to take the chance.

"Eochim was in despair. Not only was Ahrim's opposition gallingly effective, but another factor had now entered into the situation. I had personally become quite popular. There was no doubt but that the Beni-Khartougs took to me from the first. While they were careful not to come in contact with me they continually dogged my footsteps, and I had only to wish for something and it would be brought and put down within my reach.

"Incredible as it seemed, I knew, that, little by little, a third party was taking shape in Al-Khartoug—my party. I suddenly began seeing visions and dreaming dreams of superseding both Tanit and Moloch, banishing their priests and founding in the Ruba-el-Khali a little kingdom of my own, reigning as a god-king, taking a queen and passing the title on to my heirs.

"There was only one flaw to this dream, and that was Tanit. Yes, despite myself I had a sneaking respect for her power. Not all my learning, my own religion, nor any power within myself had been able to do for me what the Veil of Tanit was doing. It, and it alone, kept me, preserved me, raised me to the heights where my secret desires had ever been enthroned. How could I help believing, there, where the civilization of the Occident is as unreal as Shamanism is here on Fifth Avenue!

"Fool that I was, I couldn't wait for events to ripen, I precipitated matters by proposing a truce to Eochim. Again I was before him in his apartment telling him of my plan, clothing it in wily words.

"'I have you cornered, Eochim,' I said; 'and you know it. If any harm came to me now you would have to reckon with a factor you never thought of—my popularity. Listen then to my proposition. I like

Al-Khartoug. I will renounce the West completely, and, I assure you, without a twinge.

"Let us make an alliance, working to one end—the elimination of the workshop of Moloch. Let us enshrine Tanit, and Tanit alone. With the Veil it will be possible. I shall wear it on me all my life. Only when I come to die will I restore it to its casket so that it may be placed in the sanctuary of the temple. There is your solution. In return for that, make me a ruler with you in Al-Khartoug. With your party and my popularity we can do it, despite Ahrim. And then, in our lifetime, you will see, we will raze Moloch to the dust.'

"His eyes glowed. I had struck home, I knew. I admired my own Machiavellian finesse. It did not occur to him that in the back of my mind, despite my apparent respect for Tanit was a plan for the eventual elimination of that pagan goddess also. It was such a dream, I thought in my ecstasy, as marks the beginning of empires and the birth of dynasties.

"He sprang from the dais and walked about the room. 'There are more private chambers in my apartment than this,' he said. 'You should have warned me of what you had in mind first. If the priests of the Moloch-baal heard you they would throw you to him to burn, Veil and all. I cannot afford *that*. Leave me now until I talk it over with my people.'

"I left, sobered somewhat. At the door of the temple sat a beggar cutting a piece of bread with a dagger. An impulse came over me, and I stopped to snatch the dagger from him. He let it fall from his hands and cringed away from me. I picked it up, stuck it in an inside pocket and walked on.

"That night I awoke in my tent to the sound of footsteps without. I sat up with a lurch as the flap parted and the tall figure of Ahrim stooped to enter. He came to where I lay and regarded me with a venomous smile.

"'You are an ungrateful dog,' he said evenly. 'But for me you would have been food for the vultures these three months. Do you think I am Ahrim, Right Hand to Moloch-baal himself, for nothing? Walls speak to me and the innermost secret of the crawling ant is written in plain characters for my eyes. Now even the Veil of Tanit cannot save you. For the Moloch is greater than she, and his vengeance comes first.' He spat on me and then bent down and picked me up with one powerful hand.

"I snatched at the dagger in my pocket and with a frenzied sweep of my arm I let him have it in the ribs. It sank in with a soft crunch. Surprise and agony spread upon that evil face, and he dropped to the ground. I raced out of the tent, sped through the deserted streets to the temple of Tanit and reached the door of Eochim's apartment. My wild knocking was answered by a sleepy priest who was armed with a scimitar. He fell away before me, and in a few moments I came upon Eochim who had risen at the noise.

"'I have killed Ahrim!' I gasped. 'What shall I do?'

"He gave a groan. 'They will feed you to Moloch!'

"'It mustn't be. Come.'

"In half an hour I was perched on a camel with one companion to lead me through the desert, and I can still hear Eochim's words ringing in my ears:

"'He is taking you by the long way to Makalla. If you get through, take ship from there to Aden and seek the protection of the British. Wait for me there. It is very likely that now Ahrim is dead I may accept your proposition in good faith. It will do you no good to try and hide from me, for I shall find you wherever you are. Till then, farewell.'

"'I shall wait,' I said quietly.

"The first journey through the Ruba-el-Khali was simply a passage in the royal suite of a Cunarder compared to this second one. It is indescribable. It was after twenty solid weeks in the desert, and after it was all over, that I really came to believe with heart and soul in the Veil of Tanit. Certainly I couldn't ascribe my lasting through as much as three weeks of it to the body God gave me. I believe that without the Veil of Tanit I would now be a patch of white bones under that sun.

"My driver, used to the desert, kept cursing the day he was born that he should have to endure such hardship, such torture of sun and thirst and madness. Well, what was it in me that made me the stronger of the two? Look at me! Look at my body. Listen, we have been talking only a little while—do you hear how my breath whistles for shortness? It was the same body, enfeebled by a long sedentary life, that went without water when there was only just enough for one, so that a hardy Arab of the desert might drink it instead. How do you account for it?

"But I shan't linger on that journey. Accept it as a miracle that we reached Makalla after twenty weeks in the Ruba-el-Khali. There I board-

ed a filthy native fishing-boat and reached Aden at last. And, miracle of miracles, when I got there Eochim was waiting for me.

"It was in the library of the Government House that I had my last interview with him.

"Ahrim, he informed me, was recovering from the wound. It was now impossible for me ever to return to Al-Khartoug. Eochim had brought the box with him. He pleaded with me to return the Veil.

"No," I answered. "This thing must be played out to the end, Eochim. When I am wearing it I feel like a god. Without it life would become empty, dull, meaningless. I would be what I was, a particle of nothing. And I refuse to be nothing if I can help it. I have been that for close to fifty years. Others have climbed the ladder; others have fulfilled their lives. I have the same right despite the form in which I was cast. I will do only this for you. I will make a will in which I shall bequeath the Veil to you and your successors when I die."

"For a long time he didn't speak. When he did at last his words were charged with fate, with fate, with prophecy.

"My friend," he said, "you are living in a fool's paradise. Tanit is playing with you, for she has her playing moods. And you are responding like the puppet you are. But I tell you this: *Some day soon you will forget or neglect to wear the Veil of Tanit. That day will be your day of doom. You will die.* Whether by the caprice of Tanit or by the hand of one of my men, wherever you are, you will die. And you know very well that Tanit's vengeance is not mild. Remember Peter Armand. Remember the leper eunuch."

"With these words he left me abruptly and forever."

PROFESSOR SMITH HAD STOPPED in front of a building some minutes before he came to the end of his tale. Marquart did not even look up, so absorbed was he in the story. Smith paused for a long while. His next words tore into Marquart's consciousness.

"Those last words of Eochim have burned into my brain. '*Some day you will forget to wear the Veil,*' he had said. I resolved to make a test of that, in short, to see my adventure through to the very end, to squeeze every last drop of juice out of it.

"*Today I took off the veil, put it in its box, and went out without it!*"

"On the box I left instructions for its disposition to Eochim should I fail to return within forty-eight hours. I then divested myself of every possible mark of identification so that if I were to die I would do so anonymously and without trouble. This I owed to Eochim. I went to the

library. There I saw you, and I noticed you watching me, marking me. I saw you follow me into the reading room and smile at me. You knew! I saw you follow me downstairs. I was sure then.

"You are one of Eochim's men! By your hand I was to die! I was caught. There was no Zaimph to save me!"

Professor Smith swayed suddenly, and Marquart attributed it to his inordinate excitement. He decided that Smith must be demented, of course. But he lay on Marquart's arm like a dead weight, and Marquart eased him to the steps of a building. Smith's eyes opened and a smile came to his lips. He looked at his wristwatch and Marquart had to bend close to hear:

"This was a half-hour powder. It's fast—by two minutes . . . I foresaw everything . . . I owe it to my friend, Eochim, to save you from a possible—death penalty . . . My regards to Eochim. I even came here . . . Here! Save trouble . . . no regrets . . . I have lived . . ."

And then Smith was no more. Marquart shivered in the spring sunlight. He looked up at the building over the heads of the crowd that had quickly gathered. With a gasp he saw that Smith had led him to the threshold of the morgue.

The Reckoning

Four stories were in contention this time, but once the winner came into the lead, none of the others caught up again. Here is an instance where I picked a story which I thought was good, but never suspected that it would be your favorite. The moving finger has written thus:

(1) *After Sunset*, Philip Hazleton; (2) *Wolf Hollow Bubbles*, David H. Keller, M.D.; (3) *The Ship of Silent Men*, Philip M. Fisher; (4) *The Haunter of the Ring*, Robert E. Howard; (96) a tie between *Mrs. Kays*, Beverly Haad, and *The Vengeance of India*, Seabury Quinn.

the cauldron

We have not discontinued running old illustrations that originally accompanied some of the stories we reprint here in *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* as a matter of policy. It so happened that, in our last issue, we were unable to obtain clear and clean (that is, reasonably clear and clean) reproductions of the artwork. Our working "original" in this instance is not an artist's original, but faded, browned pages from the old magazines.

It came out this way. Hugh Rankin did a double spread for Leroux's *Woman with the Velvet Collar*; the picture included title and author's by-line and these could not have been cut without considerable loss to the picture. But we have to reduce these pictures to our page width—unless, as it happens once in a while, the outer edges can be trimmed without any important loss; and when this Rankin picture was reduced, what was already too dark in the original just became a total mess. Rankin's originals must have been real beauties with what we can deduce from the reproductions in *WEIRD TALES* as marvelous tonal effects from delicate shades of pencil on coquill. Reproduced on pulp paper, they were often too light or too dark, in the first year or so of his tenure with WT, although the too-light ones did get a great deal of feeling across. Some time in 1928 he turned to

sharper outlines and this helped at times; he also turned to pen work as well, using a pen name for these drawings (Doak). But a number of the later "soft style" drawings are still too dark.

The original reproduction of the illustration for *Tiger*, by Amos Sewell, although quite dark, came out well enough in the March 1932 issue of *STRANGE TALES*. Unfortunately, we could not supply the printer with a page from the magazine to work from; we took several copies on our dry photocopier, when we reproduced thus each and every page of the copy that Robert A. Madle loaned us (thereafter loving putting the precious issue back together, and rebinding it with needle and thread, also fastening the cover back on with rubber cement) and returned it to him. Alas, what looked perfectly adequate to my eyes did not prove adequate to the camera, and so much either blurred or dropped out that it could not be used—for it would darken still further in the printing.

The original magazine version of *The City of the Blind* had a double spread illustration in pen, which would have come out all right. Here, alas, Sam Moskowitz could not find the left hand side of the picture, although he was able to furnish me with the few lines of text that appeared on that page. (One line, which had a correction to be made

in the original proofs, managed to get lost after the final corrections were made, so that a line is missing between the bottom of the left hand page of our opening double spread and the top of the next. It is such things, as these that make an editor wonder why he bothers to read proof at all!) Incidentally, my apologies to Sam for forgetting to thank him in the blurb for supplying the text of the Leinster story.

With this present issue, we have run in to similar difficulties, so that the odds are against your seeing any pictures this time, either. But I hope to have some for you next time.

Roger Vanous writes from Columbia, Mo: "I give up! I can't rate the stories in SMS #11. For a while, I thought I liked *Mrs. Kaye* best, and *The Vengeance of India* least, but I'm not even sure about that any more—(currently my preferences on those two stories are reversed) . . .

"I, for one, haven't read too many vampire or werewolf stories to enjoy still more, so I liked those.

"*Wolf Hollow Bubbles* was fun reading, as was *The Haunter of the Ring*. I guess I'd have to say the same thing about *The Ship of Silent Men*. The *Seabury Quinn* story was about as enjoyable as other Quinn stories, which means it was also good."

The very first report I heard on this issue, over the telephone, also expressed such general pleasure over all the stories that none could be listed as first place over the others. I accept such reader's opinions, but hearing this filled me with dismay; and sure enough, later on came a

preference page dutifully rating the stories, but saying that the reader did not find any of them especially good.

LTC (Ret.) Herman R. Jacks writes from Arizona: "*Wolf Hollow Bubbles*, by Dr. Keller was my favorite story of the issue, but because it was a 'Taine of San Francisco' story and I had thought that I had them all. Checking my notebook files, I find that the *The Menace* (which consisted of 'The Menace', 'The Gold Ship', 'The Tainted Flood' and 'The Insane Avalanche') was published twice: first in *AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY*, Summer 1928 and second in the next-to-last issue of *AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY*, Winter 1933. I doubt very much if these stories could be reprinted today, because of their racial content. Also, the plot of 'The Gold Ship' is at variance with Keynesian economics and what we now know of currency; however, this was written when we were still on the gold standard.

"The other stories in the series were:

"*The Feminine Metamorphosis*, *SCIENCE WONDER STORIES*, August 1929;

"*Euthanasia Limited*, *AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY*, Fall 1929;

"*A Scientific Widowhood*, *SCIENTIFIC DETECTIVE MONTHLY*, February 1930;

"*Burning Water*, *AMAZING DETECTIVE TALES*, June 1930;

"*Menacing Claws*, *AMAZING DETECTIVE STORIES*, September 1930;

"*The Cerebral Library*", *AMAZING STORIES*, May 1931;

"*The Tree of Evil*", *WONDER STORIES*, September 1934;

"*Island of White Mice*", *AMAZING STORIES*, February 1935.

They would all make good candidates for republication by you. In fact, I would like to see them in book form, listed as they occurred rather than in the order originally published. They cover the entire span of Taine's career, but I do not believe that they are internally consistent...

"Are there other unpublished Taine stories?"

Yes, there are a number of unpublished stories by Dr. Keller, about Taine of San Francisco. Mrs. Keller tells me. These include one which was published in an amateur magazine, with very limited circulation (like the original pamphlet edition of *Wolf Hollow Bubbles*), and we are considering this one for early appearance in SMS: the title of it is, *The Temple of Death*, and it is quite bizarre in Dr. Keller's very special manner.

C. J. Probert lists *Wolf Hollow Bubbles* as best in issue #11, with *The Vengeance of India* second, and adds: "The Keller was far and away the best by him that I have ever read. Totally engrossing. So was the Quinn, with the possible exception of *The White Lady of the Orphanage*, which may just go to show how little of him I've read. I've read other reader's comments on de Grandin, wherein he is called 'droll', but up to now I didn't know what they meant. *After Sunset* was also engrossing, and I thought the same was, despite your disclaimer, well-handled.

Which raises a question: when did *STRANGE TALES* fold? I saw a reference in E. Hoffmann Price's "Strange Gateways" to a story by him, *One More River*, as published in the February 1941 *STRANGE TALES*, copyrighted by Clayton Magazines...

The Clayton title, *STRANGE TALES*, folded up with the issue dated January 1933, published and copyright late in 1932. Whether or not Street & Smith purchased this title, along with *ASTOUNDING STORIES* and others (such as *CLUES*) the title was never revived. The notice that appears in the Price volume is a misprint: the magazine title should have been *STRANGE STORIES* and the copyright would be by whatever corporation name the Standard magazines were using for copyright purposes at the time—possibly "Better Publications".

I certainly did not intend to imply that *After Sunset* was not good, or not well done, but only my conviction that the first-person vampire story has been done several times since 1931, and done better—so that those who had read later treatments of the theme might find this first treatment somewhat primitive. But I'd not have re-run it if it did not contain solid merit, to my eyes, no matter how much better others had treated the theme later.

Mrs. Alan Case writes: "I liked Mrs. Kaye and *After Sunset* best. They were weird and—since I am a woman—maybe I enjoyed them because they were about women, although I would like to read a story

where the woman won out; neither one did in these stories. *Wolf Hollow Bubbles* and *The Ship of Silent Men* were too much like science fiction for me. The cover reminded me of the story of the Tell-Tale Heart. Was that what it was supposed to be about?"

Yes, you are correct. Finlay's drawing, which was used for the cover of Issue #11, was taken from *The Tell-Tale Heart*, by Edgar Allan Poe.

Dr. Stuart D. Schiff writes from NYC: "In reading issue #11 of SMS, I was happy to see one or two of the old illustrations from the original stories. They always seem interesting to me and sort of elicit a secondary response of awe and wonder that the old pulp magazines elicit from me when I peruse the few copies I have. Knowing that the magazine I read is fresh and brand new, the aura of crinkling yellowed paper which set the mood of my first excursions into the world of weird fiction is hard to imagine. The illustrations do help a bit though.

"About the issue itself, most of the stories were Okay, but only one of them seemed to me beyond just readable. That one was Philip Hazeleton's *After Sunset*. This powerful classic really drew me into the story, especially the demise of poor Vera. . .

"The cover was one of Finlay's best to date in your series."

Using those old illustrations do, indeed, give something of the effect of the crinkling old issues—although they weren't yellowed and crinkling when I and others eagerly seized

them from the newsstands; that is one reason why I'm sorrowful when it isn't possible to reproduce a picture which still seems adequate enough to re-run.

David Charles Pashow writes "1—*Vengeance of India*; as usual, de Grandin is tops with me. I find myself temporarily blind to any possible literary defects. 2—*Wolf Hollow Bubbles* & *The Haunter of the Ring*; I never cease to be impressed by the late Dr. Keller's versatility, his being equally at home with science fiction and weird fiction. And Howard remains a fascinating enigma. . .

"Regarding your editorial: It's a pity that no one has seen fit to issue Robert Fish's *The Incredible Sherlock Holmes* in paperback. Also, the late William S. Baring-Gould wrote a book on Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe—*Nero Wolfe of West Thirty-Fifth Street*. It was Gould who, in his *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street*, suggested that Wolfe and Holmes have very much in common."

Dave Drake, offsets the early reports of superiority of the 11th issue: "Not my favorite issue, I fear. Normally I'm a strong de Grandin fan, but even the mediocre position I gave him this time was by default. The less memorable stories, *Mrs. Kaye* and *After Sunset*, were well written, while the striking pieces were in vile prose."

This winds up the comments on the Winter issue; but modesty will not be permitted to stand in the way of passing on to you a comment received early in the returns on our 12th issue, Spring.

William D. Jenkins of the BSI, Cabell Society, etc., writes: "The high quality of the Editor's Page in SMS deserves the warmest commendation. Your literate comments on the classics of mystery can be appreciated by older readers, while they also serve to stimulate interest on the part of young people. Especially valuable are your speculations on the introductory essay on analysis which begins Edgar Allan Poe's *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. I think you are right in suggesting that Poe "felt that the reader needed this introduction in order to comprehend or sympathize with what the author was doing." The key to this may be found in the very first paragraph, wherein Poe mentions the pleasure to be derived from the exercise of the analytical faculties. Poe was inventing a new type of story; one which the reader enjoys to the full extent when he attempts to pit his skill in analysis against the skill in synthesis displayed by the author. Thank you for calling attention to this aspect of the first real detective story."

Luther Norris writes: "Just a brief note from the murky depths of The Pontine Marshes by the old Lord Warden to let you know how much we enjoyed the various remarks in *The Cauldron* on Solar Pons . . .

"Although Holmes and Pons may be as alike as two peas in a pod, it is interesting to note that the main difference between the two exists not in, but outside their methods.

"Solar Pons is a widely traveled man, having offices not only at 7B Praed-street, but also at Chicago, New York, Paris, Vienna, Rome, and Prague, while Holmes does most of

his sleuthing in England, with occasional visits to Scotland and France. Holmes, of course, is a resident of the late 19th century, while Pons is a product of the early 20th century.

"Another difference between the two detectives is their attitudes toward their colleagues, Drs. Watson and Parker. Pons, at times, is a little too critical of his companion, whereas Holmes is more understanding. Pons also seems to have a better sense of humor than Holmes, referring to Holmes as his 'illustrious predecessor'.

"Both detectives are authors of several monographs. The works of Pons are slightly more varied, as Holmes, for the most part, deals with subjects related to detective work. An Inquiry into the Nan-Matal Ruins of Ponapae and An Examination of the Cthulhu Cult and Others shows that Pons has a more varied interest than Holmes.

"Many similarities exist between the two detectives, but Pons has probably been best summed up by Vincent Starrett, in his introduction to the first Pontine collection, as 'a clever impersonator, with a twinkle in his eye, which tells us that he knows he is not Sherlock Holmes, and knows that we know it, but that he hopes we will like him anyway for what he symbolizes.'"

Very nicely put. As Sir Donald Francis Tovey once noted, in another frame of reference, two objects, or two persons, may be as alike as two peas in a pod, but not as alike as two buttons in a row.

Should we not consider the possibility that Pons's range of subject

matter for monographs might be wider than Homes's simply because Holmes pre-empted certain areas of discussion? And we should, indeed, bear in mind not only that the Nan-Matal and Cthulhu Cult problems came to the fore after Holmes had retired, but again that it is not impossible that Pons might have been in touch with his 'illustrious predecessor' in relation to some aspects of them. Again, since it is Pons's Agent, rather than Dr. Watson's, who had certain intimate connections with investigation into the Cthulhu Cult, it would be no more than natural that Pons (who, as you note, did have more conveniently located offices) would have been called upon here. When it is feasible to release some of the more guarded material in Pons's and Dr. Parker's files, might we not find that our friends are more closely connected with some of these doings than generally suspected?


Luther Norris sent me the following intelligence about the Edgar Wallace Club, Organizer, Penelope Wallace, 4 Bradmore Road, Oxford, OX 6QW, England:

"The object of the Club is to provide members with information, by means of a Newsletter, on matters of interest about Edgar Wallace, including details of books about to be published, as well as those already in print. In addition, there will be news of films, television, radio, etc.

"I propose to provide some space in each Newsletter in which members can advertise, at no cost to themselves, any copies of books by Edgar Wallace which they want to buy, sell, or exchange. This will be similar to the E. W. Book Mart, which appeared in the *EDGAR WALLACE MYSTERY MAGAZINE*, and will enable collectors to contact each other.

"I am hoping to send out four Newsletters annually, the subscription being 10/- (\$1.40, U. S.; \$1.47, Canada) per annum. The financial year of the club will begin on 1st January, and members joining during the year will be charged on a pro rata basis.

"The Club is intended to be of use to its members, and suggestions as to its improvement and development will always be welcome. (signed) Penelope Wallace."



Coming Next Issue

The thought foremost in my mind as I met the two dogs' gaze was that they must be dogs of very large size indeed, since the window was as high as my own head and I assumed that they were reared up against it outside. For perhaps two full minutes I stood without moving and met the gaze of the two dogs.

Then with an ejaculation I moved toward the window through which the two dog-faces looked. At once they vanished from sight and there was a sound of running feet outside and two husky howls. These were answered by two or three others and then with some little relief I heard the barking cries of all the beasts receding southward.

I found to my surprise that I was trembling a little. The appearance of the two dogs' heads at my window had been so sudden, and there had been something so striking in their fixed gaze at me, that my nerves had been affected. I went to the door and looked out into the soft black night. From southward came the husky barking chorus.

My gaze, as I turned to re-enter the cottage, happened to strike the ground outside the window by the door. Suddenly I was tense, staring. The ground was illuminated by light that spilled through the window. It was black earth soft from recent rains, bearing imprints like wax. But there were in it no imprints at all of the paws of the two police-dogs who a moment before had peered in at me!

Instead, newly made in the soft black earth and as plain to sight as day, were the tracks of two pairs of *bare human feet*! These tracks came toward the window and departed, and the impression at the window had their toes pointed toward it and were deeper sunken, for all the world as *though two men had been looking in my window a moment before instead of two dogs*!

I stared at the tracks dazedly, uncomprehending. I could not see a single dog-track on all the ground around my cottage, only the tracks of bare human feet. Then the full strangeness of the thing smote me. Dogs that left human tracks instead of canine ones! Dogs whose barking sounded strange and un-doglike! Were these, then, the dogs that people of the region feared?

Strange and bizarre is the case of

THE DOGS OF DOCTOR DWANN

by Edmond Hamilton

The Editor's Page

(Continued from page 7)

afforded. Thus much escaped the writer of which he could have availed himself had he been on the spot and visited the localities."

Mary Rogers becomes Marie Roget; the essential facts of the real murder are duplicated in detail; the inessential facts are paralleled.

Poe both draws the reader's attention to what he is really doing, and disguises it in a brief introduction where he speaks of coincidences which may seem almost supernatural, but which actually are quite natural in the light of what he terms the "Calculus of Probabilities". And, he says, a prime recent example of this is the case of Marie Cecilia Rogers; for, *mirabili dicta*, a nearly exact parallel took place in Paris: "This event occurred about two years after the atrocity in the Rue Morgue." And we find that its solution was one of the most brilliant exploits of our narrator's friend, C. Auguste Dupin.

This is not an extraordinary crime; it is a rather common and sordid one. (I remember a policeman telling me some years ago that the bizarre murders may take some special work, but are not too difficult. The really tough ones, he said—the ones that sometimes do not get solved at all—are cases where the culprit hashes the victim on the head with a bandy jagged rock, and there are no witnesses.)

Why, then, does Dupin bother with the Marie Roget case? "The

first intelligence of the murder was brought to us by G—, in person . . . He had been piqued by the failure of all his endeavors to ferret out the assassins. His reputation—so he said with a peculiarly Parisian air—was at stake. Even his honor was concerned. The eyes of the public were upon him; and there was really no sacrifice which he would not be willing to make for the development of the mystery . . ."

Dupin gets his information from the police, from newspaper accounts, and from editorials in the papers. He makes no investigation of the scene of the crime, etc. He proposes his solution from the armchair. And in the story (page 137), we find the following placed in square brackets.

"For reasons which we shall not specify, but which to many readers will appear obvious, we have taken the liberty of here omitting, from the MSS. placed in our hands, such portion as details the following up of the apparently slight clue obtained by Dupin. We feel it advisable only to state, in brief, that the result desired was brought to pass; and that the Prefect fulfilled punctually, although with reluctance, the terms of his compact with the Chevalier . . ." (At the end of this matter in brackets, we have the signature "Eds." and a footnote tells us that this refers to the editors of the magazine in which the article was originally published. I cannot but wonder, though, whether this did not appear in the original *manuscript*; since the

Mary Rogers case was still open, surely Poe would have realized that—assuming his solution correct—revelation of the details whereby the essential clues should be followed up might serve to insure the culprit's escape.)

The Mystery of Marie Roget includes the puncturing of common notions connected with the behavior of corpses under water, etc., and this is another element that has been widely followed by subsequent authors. (Whether our great detective's certainties as to the facts of the matter are actually any less fallacy or superstition than that which he is puncturing remains moot; new superstitions drive out old ones, and the notion that something which drives out an old superstition cannot possibly be superstition itself is among the greatest of superstitions.)

As noted above, Poe took a considerable risk in publishing this story, for not only did he lack the advantage of examining the locale himself, but he was in danger of being misled by the sort of sloppy reporting which one frequently finds in the papers—at any time in the history of journalism. We are told, though: "It may not be improper to record, nevertheless, that the confessions of two persons (one of them the Madame Deluc of the narrative) made, at different periods, long subsequent to the publication, confirmed, in full, not only the general conclusion, but absolutely *all* the chief hypothetical details by which that conclusion was attained." (From the introduction, page 103.)

Thus, *The Mystery of Marie Ro-*

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get gives us some more firsts for Poe:

21. Dupin is the first fictional private detective to appear in a series of stories.

22. The police come to Dupin, imploring his help.

23. Dupin solves the mystery upon data brought to him, without leaving his quarters; it is entirely armchair detective work.

24. Dupin does not question any persons other than the Prefect; he solves the case solely on official data and newspaper accounts.

25. In this second appearance, Dupin no longer appears as a bizarre character. Only a slight suggestion of minor eccentricity is presented.

26. Dupin presents the police with data which enable them to apprehend the culprit. He takes no part in following up his deductions.

27. In the course of discussing the case, Dupin undertakes to explode popular notions relating to matters often connected with crime.

The Purloined Letter, last of the series, is easily the best in a number of ways—but not in all ways. It is the best written, to the modern taste. *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* could not help but arouse suspicion that this was but an invention to illustrate the author's theory of analysis, rather than an episode in the career of the famous C. Auguste Dupin. Nor again, can we depart from suspicion of ulterior motives behind *The Mystery of Marie Roget*—Mr. Poe is so full of enthusiasms and messages, so apt

with fables which purportedly prove his contentions! But *The Purloined Letter* has no such flaws: it starts at once, in Dupin's quarters, one autumn evening.

By a most interesting coincidence, the narrator and Dupin have just been discussing the two previous cases when Monsieur G., the Prefect of Parisian police, enters; what is more, he enters at the end of the very first paragraph. The game is afoot, as a spiritual son of Dupin will say.

Four and two thirds pages of animated dialogue follow, wherein we learn of the Prefect's problem (the stolen letter which must be recovered), and the futile search for it; and Dupin says he has no better advice to offer than that the Prefect and his men make a thorough re-search of the premises where he agrees that the letter must be hidden.

"'I have no better advice to give you,' said Dupin. 'You have, of course, an accurate description of the letter?'"

"'Oh, yes!'"—And here the Prefect, producing a memorandum-book, proceeded to read aloud a minute account of the internal, and especially of the external appearance of the missing document. Soon after finishing the perusal of this description, he took his departure, more entirely depressed in spirits than I had ever known the good gentleman before."

It is generally contended that the reader has no fair chance to solve the mystery of the hiding place of the letter; and so far as the precise spot is concerned, I would say that this is

correct. But it does seem to me that the reader is given a fair enough opportunity to grasp the principle of concealment which is the point of the story.

A month passes, then the Prefect drops around to Dupin's quarters again, and admits that he is completely stumped. He re-searched the premises of the man who stole the letter

(there is no question of who the culprit is, nor again a matter of capturing him; a royal scandal will result if the existence of the letter is generally known at all), as Dupin suggested, but to no avail. Dupin asks if there is a reward for the return of the letter, and the Prefect says, "... I wouldn't mind giving my individual check for fifty thousand francs

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#2, Fall 1966: The House of Horror, Seabury Quinn; The Man in Black, John Brunner; The Strange Case of Phazael, Roger Eugene Ulsner; The Witch Is Dead, Edward D. Hoch; Doctor Saiton, Paul Ernst; The Secret of the City, Terry Carr and Ted White; The Street (verse), Robert A. W. Lowndes; The Scourge of B'Mash, Bertram Russell.

#3, Winter 1966/67: The Inn of Terror, Gaston Leroux; The Other, Robert A. W. Lowndes; The Door of Doom, Hugh B. Cave; A Matter of Breeding, Ralph Hayes; Emeralds, Rama Wells; The Trial for Murder, Chas. Dickens & Chas. Collins; The Blood-Flower, Seabury Quinn.

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#6, Fall 1967: My Lady of the Tunnel, Arthur J. Burks; The Glass Floor, Stephen King; Death From Within, Sterling S. Cramer; A Victim (verse), Robert E. Howard; Aim for Perfection, Beverly Haas; The Dark Castle, Marion Brandon; Donna Diabla, Anna Hunger; The Druid's Shadow, Seabury Quinn.

#7, Winter 1967/68: The Bride of the Peacock, E. Hoffmann Price; Near Old House, Donna Tolson; Those Who Seek, August Derleth; John Sartain's Watch, Ambrose Bierce; The Pet of Mrs. Little, Robert Barbour Johnson; The Man Who Chained the Lightning, Paul Ernst.

to anyone who could obtain me the letter. The fact is, it is becoming of more and more importance every day; and the reward has been lately doubled. If it were trebled, I could do not more than I have done."

After a little badinage, wherein the Prefect repeats that he would really give fifty thousand francs to anyone who could aid him in the matter:

"In that case," replied Dupin, opening a drawer, and producing a check book, "you may as well fill me up a check for the amount mentioned. When you have signed it, I will hand you the letter."

The Prefect signs the check, and Dupin "...unlocking an *escritoire*, took thence a letter and gave it to the Prefect. This functionary grasped it in a perfect agony of joy, opened it with a trembling hand, cast a rapid glance at its contents, and then scrambling and struggling to the door, rushed at length unceremoniously from the room and from the house, without having uttered a syllable since Dupin had requested him to fill up the check." And with this exit, he exits from the Poe series, for he does not return to learn how Dupin obtained the letter, or where it had been hidden. Seven pages of question and answer between the narrator and Dupin fill us in.

In the course of this, we learn something of Dupin's past, of the days prior to those misfortunes that left him in the rather sorry condition in which the narrator first met him in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. We further have Dupin taking action, and rather dangerous action at that; however, he has deduced in advance how to look for the letter—and that, of course, is the answer to

the riddle. It becomes astonishingly simple to locate it. Recovering it, while easy for the Prefect and his forces, is another matter; here Dupin resorts to assistance, so that a diversion is created just long enough to substitute a facsimile for the letter.

Despite the fact that the explanation goes on for somewhat more pages than were taken to come to the delivery of the letter to the Prefect, Poe holds the reader's interest. The pace of the writing slows down a little, as it must when an illustrated lecture is given, but this is more compensated for by the suspense and the revelation of Dupin's character which is presented. *The Purloined Letter* remains a remarkably swift-moving short story, and is actually somewhat longer than it appears to be.

Now let's see what this gives us to add to our list:

28. New facets of Dupin's character are shown.

29. An element of humor—the practical joke on the Prefect—is worked in without appearing strained.

30. Dupin has a personal score to settle with the culprit.

31. The problem here is not how to reveal, but how to help officially conceal the existence of a crime.

32. The health of the state is involved; although a genuine puzzle mystery, *The Purloined Letter* is also a cloak-and-dagger story of intrigue.

Space will not permit me to trespass upon the reader's fun in noting which of the great fictional detectives have followed which of these 32 points—and I do not doubt that the astute reader will be able to derive farther points from the three



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#9, Summer 1968: The Black Mass, Col. S. P. Meek; The Last Archer, Earl Petron, Jr.; The Sight of Roses, Jay Tyler; Webbed Hands, Ferdinand Berthoud; Aerophobia (verse), L. Sprague de Camp; Hollywood Horror, Paul Ernst.

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#11, Winter 1968/69: Wolf Hollow Babylon, David H. Keller, M.D.; Mrs. Kane Beverly Haaf; The Hunter of the Ring, Robert E. Howard; The Vengeance of Indra, Seabury Quinn; After Sunset, Philip Haskleton; The Ship of Silent Men, Philip M. Fisher; The Whisperer (verse) Robert A. W. Lowndes.

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Order From Page 128

stories. However, I would like to draw your attention to #28. This shows the series to be an evolutionary one; for in each story, not only are there references to the previous stories, but Dupin is revealed in a somewhat new light. The Dupin of *The Purloined Letter* is quite different from the Dupin of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, even though the central facet of his character, his delight in solving human behavior puzzles through ratiocination, remains unchanged. There is another type of series, the template (and I thank James Blish for pointing out these terms and their meanings to me), wherein the chief repeated characters are the same from story to story. The best example I can think of offhand for the template puzzle detective type of series is the Perry Mason series on TV. Mason and the others age not; neither are they increased—albeit not diminished—in wisdom, joy, or sorrow, etc. from case to case.

The advantage of the template series is that each one is entirely complete in itself, and the reader (or viewer in the case of Mason) does not need any previous acquaintance with the characters in order to comprehend all that is going on in this one. The disadvantage of the template series is that, after awhile, the chief characters become almost totally predictable, and if one of them is presented as rather slow-witted, then he has to stay that way. (The Sherlock Holmes series is evolutionary; both Holmes and Watson grow older and fuller, and the Watson of the late stories is not quite so laggard as he was earlier—and it is not impossible that he actually knows a



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great deal more than he lets on.)

The advantage of the evolutionary series, of course, is that it is semi-biography in serial form. The disadvantage is that, for the sake of verisimilitude, there must be reference to earlier events and we just cannot have the characters lecturing each other on the full details every time. The reader really needs to read the stories in chronological order.

I do not recall reading any novel about the spiritual descendants of Dupin which presented all 32 of the points above, or for that matter any series which has all 32; but I cannot think of any which do not draw upon these points liberally.

My opinion that *The Purloined Letter* is not the best of the three tales in all ways is, of course, a subjective evaluation, and not something susceptible to objective proof—although I can offer objective reasons for the opinion. The solution to the puzzle is an enormously clever one, and must have so appeared to the readers of the times—even as it appeared to me when I first read it in high school literature class. And the excellence of the writing and construction is such that the story remains delightful even when its single punch is over-familiar. But where it falls behind both *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Mystery of Marie Roget* is in the essential triviality the problem.

It has been written, and it has been said, that we are all murderers in our hearts in one way or another, or at one time or another. I think that is why Willard Huntington Wright (S. S. van Dine) made murder the necessary crime for a detective novel, whatever other crimes and misdemeanors might also be involved

in the case. Psychologists tell us that some of us murder-mystery-puzzle lovers identify subconsciously with the hunter in these stories, while others of us identify with the hunted. But in either case, the stakes are the highest we know of: the life in our present bodies.

In a short story, it is true, a lesser stake is acceptable for entertainment; but even there, the well wrought murder mystery will appeal more strongly, I believe, than the equally well wrought lesser mystery.

My list of elements that subsequent authors derived (directly or indirectly) from Poe comes to 32. Perhaps you can find more; but even if you cannot, it is a sizeable list, and I do not know of any subsequent author who has added half so much again to the list. It does not matter if some of the items can be traced back to other writers before Edgar Allan Poe; he was the first to put them all together in a shorter total of words than you will find in any of the best novels that came after him.

Poul Anderson deservedly won a prize at the 1969 annual dinner of the Baker Street Irregulars for his article, *Sherlock Holmes, Avatar*. Much as I cherish Holmes and appreciate acceptance by other worthy members of the BSI, I must risk their displeasure by stating my honest conviction that Dupin, rather than our beloved Sherlock is the avatar—but Sherlock Holmes is his greatest reincarnation, just as Gautama, though not the first of the Buddhas, is known to us as The Buddha. (But then, Dupin, we must remember, was a *fictional* character.)

RAWL

Reader's Preference Page

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